

K A S H M I R .
Behind the White Curtain
1972-1991

KASHMIR
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Preface

This book began taking shape in my mind soon after an attack of arson on my home in November 1989, the subsequent rush of events of January 1990, and a bomb blast and a second attack of arson on my home in May 1990. Kashmir was already seething with turmoil. Deep down in my heart I was searching for the causes that had led to this catastrophe.

Since I had been associated with political affairs of the State since 1972, I reviewed, in retrospect, many small and big events of this long period enabling me to perceive, in depth and in totality, the ups and downs of political developments in Jammu and Kashmir. I began to be persuaded that I could possibly delineate the chain of events that had contributed to the present deteriorating state of socio-political life in the valley.

I have, therefore, attempted to narrate, on the basis of my personal knowledge and experience, all the events of this important and crucial contemporary period of history. In the process I have also highlighted some of those important events about which much may not be known to the public.

Although over the years, a lot has been written about Kashmir's contemporary political situation, to my knowledge, no account has been written by a person belonging to Kashmir, who has been deeply involved with the socio-political situation in the State. More often than not, the destiny of nations is shaped by the foibles of many actors in the political drama. Kashmir's has been no exception. If I may say so, perhaps Kashmir's destiny has been more profoundly affected by human follies than any other region of the world. The human face of politics often remains deeply buried in the debris of superficial events.

My attempt has been to provide in this narrative those facts which provide direct contact with, and insight into, the human

factors of political events.

I am indebted to late S.L. Bhan, a pioneering industrialist of Kashmir, who was lovingly called Jijajee, for his constant encouragement in my political endeavours. He was keen to see this book finished. His untimely death in July 1991 robbed me of the pleasure of his seeing it completed. For writing the book I had unflinching support and assistance, in manifold ways, of my husband Dr. O.N. Wakhlu, who helped me to accomplish the task in record time. I must express my deep gratitude to D.D. Thakur and his wife Saraswati who have been real friends in need during our long ordeal of the last several years. Other friends and dear ones have also given a lot of support for which I am grateful. Prof. Bhabani SenGupta of the Centre of Policy Research, New Delhi, read the manuscript and provided excellent editing support.

My children Arun and Anu have given me generously of their affection besides placing at my disposal word processor facilities of their Pragati Learning System organisation. Bharat and Savita kept helpfully egging me on all the while. My sister Bashaji and her husband Dr. C.L. Munshi proved to be tolerant and generous hosts during my wanderings and provided physical and moral support for writing in their small apartment crowded with migrant relatives.

S. Venkataraman of Pragati Learning System deserves a word of appreciation for his excellent secretarial support. I owe him special thanks and gratitude. Thanks are also to Acharya who provided assistance with the word processor. Mr. V.C. Jain and Mr. K.P.R. Nair of Konark Publishers deserve my thanks and I owe a debt of gratitude to them for expediting the printing of the book. Professor Khurmi also lent valuable help which is gratefully acknowledged.

KHEM LATA WAKHLU

Contents

1. A Fearful Outburst	1
2. The Year 1972	6
3. Sheikh-Indira Accord	18
4. Plebiscite Front Dissolved	29
5. Sheikh at the Helm	39
6. Elections 1977	55
7. March towards Prosperity	63
8. Bhutto Hanged	93
9. Ladakh Visit	102
10. Mid-Term Poll 1980	108
11. Political Goings-on	116
12. Farooq Appointed President of NC	138
13. Lion of Kashmir is no more	165
14. Farooq as Chief Minister	177
15. Double Farooq	191
16. Assembly Elections 1983	202
17. The Naked Dance	215
18. Strained Relations	221
19. Failure of Reconciliation	228
20. G.M. Shah as Chief Minister	260
21. Governor's Rule, 1986	311
22. Rajiv-Farooq Accord	318
23. The MUF Wave	320
24. Militancy	333
25. The Downhill Slide	340
26. Paradise Destroyed	390
27. Epilogue	393
<i>INDEX</i>	397

Chapter 1

A Fearful Outburst

S RINAGAR has been witness to many events in its centuries long chequered history. But the night of 21st January 1990 will not be forgotten for a long time to come by the people inhabiting this loveliest of all valleys in the world, Kashmir. The events were an outburst of demonic proportions by people surcharged with emotion and fear. People got totally involved and carried away. There was the suddenness of a flood wave in the happenings and everyone was deeply involved and affected.

Things were brewing up, though. Over the last one year there were bomb blasts at many places, innocent people were killed by bullets at point blank range; bandhs and closures of the markets were common, rioting and arson were beginning to appear at places and many establishments were gutted by fires from time to time.

But that day things were different. There was fear, apprehension, and hope writ large on every face. I was full of anxiety and fear. Anything could have happened any time any minute. We were apprehensive, helpless, and in a dazed state of mind. Suddenly, there were loud noises heard from everywhere. The entire surroundings shook by the blast of human voices in fearful anger.

There were slogans and the loudest possible shouts, from a mass of human beings, resonating from the open blue sky of a cold wintry night. We missed a heart beat as our telephone rang rather abruptly. Such was the intensity of fear which gripped us, that we thought it was a call from the MAHAKAL! (the messenger of death). My hands shook as I lifted the receiver. A frightened young man had called from the interior of the city. His voice was trembling with fear, panic and anxiety. His voice was not audible. But among other things he said:

"Sahib, we live here in Zaindar Mohalla. We are in the jaws of death. Please ring up the police control room. There is a sea of people going along in the streets below. They are shouting frightening slogans. What they might do in a jiffy cannot be imagined. We are doomed."

I tried to get in touch with the police control room. Their telephones were dead. Some rang, but there was no response. The whole system seemed to have collapsed. Getting in touch with the police was impossible. The telephone, which was our only link for some assurance of safety, did not respond at this hour of crisis and grave danger. Desperately, anxiously, and somewhat mechanically, we went on fiddling with the telephone to keep off our fear. This was of no avail.

In the meanwhile, a huge crowd of people in several processions was already on the move in our own street. They were shouting slogans which impinged on our eardrums and our psyche, like bomb blasts in an air-raid. We trembled, realising that this flood of people might smash our compound gate, enter in, and destroy our home. The fear arose because earlier an attempt at arson had already been made to burn our home. The crescendo of threats and propaganda unleashed over several weeks gave rise to fear of such actions from an uncontrolled and emotionally surcharged mob. Nothing could be ruled out particularly because the administration had momentarily collapsed and abdicated its primary responsibility of maintaining civil order.

The angry mass of humanity was patently like *Yamraj*—the lord of death himself—about to act. Such was our feeling of insecurity. We had lost our senses and our capacity to think intelligently, our wisdom and indeed, it looked as if we were frozen in a stupor. My husband and I were moving around, up and down the house trying to have a look at the crowd. We were like puppets acting under the command of God of Fear.

"Allah-O-Akbar! Allah-O-Akbar! (God is great). Indian Dogs go back!. Burn, burn alive the Indians dogs! What do we want? We want freedom. Young want freedom, old want freedom. Indian dogs go back." These were the fiery slogans shouted by the

crowd while it slowed down and halted in front of our house for a while, emphasizing the slogans more vehemently than before.

We were frozen with fear inside our house with all the doors and windows shut and the lights turned off. We were praying intensely to the goddess in her various manifestations of "Sharika", "Durga" and "Vaishnov Devi" and pleading earnestly, "Oh dear Mother! creator of the Universe, He' Durga!, He' Amba!, please call a halt to this destructive play. Dear Mother, please bring peace to the people and show us the real good path. Let the misguided youth be made to see reason and bring them back onto the right path. Please protect the people from evil. Let you, dear Mother, awaken from your slumber, be merciful to your children and protect them from catastrophe."

Indeed, our prayers had, for a while, been heeded. The crowd shouting slogans and standing in front of our house started moving ahead along the road slowly, peacefully. This was a small consolation, that the immediate threat to our safety seemed to pass away. But the whole city was resounding with shouts, shrieks, slogans and a frightening chaos. The slogans against India were like a deep sore on the chest of a patriotic population. On the one hand they feared death and destruction and on the other, was the immense anger of the people. It was extremely difficult, if not very nearly impossible, to steer oneself safely in such a predicament.

There seemed to be no government in position. The extremists brandishing their guns were lording it over people everywhere. They had surrounded the people and controlled their minds on all fronts. And people had chosen to go along with them because they seemed to be the winning side. It was a strange predicament. One wondered if there was a way out of this situation.

We tried to have some sleep but could get little. Our heartbeats began to sound like bullet shots. We sat up and pondered as every second ticked away slowly, very slowly. The night became too long. The crowds having carried out the processions went home and there was silence all around in the early hours of the morning.

Next day the crowds were mobilized by the militants again in

the heart of the city. Curfew had meanwhile been imposed by the Governor of the State, and the paramilitary forces like the Border Security Force and the Central Reserve Police Force had positioned themselves in all the streets. A huge crowd of people carried out a procession in Gaw Kadal area of the city as well as many other localities simultaneously. The extremists were hidden within the crowds and having the mass of people as a shield, they fired shots at the paramilitary forces. The security forces had ruthlessly opened fire in return and there was chaos and death. People raised anguished cries and ran hither and thither. Hundreds were wounded, lost and dead. The news of death and destruction spread like wildfire and there was acute resentment amongst the people. It was the saddest day in the recent years of the valley's history. The authorities imposed indefinite curfew in the city. A death-like silence prevailed in every nook and corner. Srinagar turned into a graveyard, it seemed everything had been burnt to ashes. Sorrow, anxiety, fear, tragedy and anger gripped the populace. There wasn't even a rustling sound anywhere. It was a tragic wonder that one could hear the barks and howling of the dogs in the city, as if proclaiming that they were not human beings but demons. The howling of the dogs was causing fear, as if proclaiming some very bad omen. Later, there was movement of vehicles of the security forces amidst the howling of dogs. This persisted as night came and further intensified our awe. I could not sleep. My mind wandered and pondered over the situation.

Why did all this happen? What has gone wrong and where? Who is responsible and where do we apportion blame for such unprecedented developments? What has been the role of the State and the Central Govts.? Have the Governments followed the right policies in respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir? Did the intelligence agencies in the State perform their functions properly and efficiently? Who has been instrumental in fostering communal politics of fundamentalist organizations over the years and what role have Sheikh Abdullah, his colleagues, Dr. Farooq, Maulvi Farooq and many others played in bringing Kashmir to the present impasse? Many events have taken place over the years and one wonders which ones played the most critical role to push

Kashmir into the present turmoil of catastrophic dimensions. These questions bothered me and I went over the goings-on over the last eighteen years to recapitulate and clarify my perception of the present reality as it confronted us.

Chapter 2

The Year 1972

THE time was the early months of the Spring, with cold shivering nights caused by a prolonged and a freezing cold wave. The elections to the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly had been announced. There was hectic political activity everywhere as people in the election fray had intensified their election campaigns. I got an opportunity as an independent candidate in the elections to move from door to door, house to house. I wanted to fight the elections earnestly and was therefore in the fray.

Earlier in December 1971, the Pakistani army had been defeated in the Bangladesh War and an independent Bangladesh had been established. For emotional reasons the people of Kashmir were not happy over this partition of Pakistan into two independent units. To a section of the Muslim population of Kashmir, Pakistan appeared to be the one big Islamic nation of the world. But when this nation was divided into two, it was like a wound on their chest. They always wished to link Kashmir with Pakistan more closely by virtue of the religious Muslim connection of the majority in the State. The number of such people was not significant at that time. They were mostly a remnant group from amongst those who had opposed the accession of the State to the Union of India in 1947. The accession took place under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, who commanded a towering and decisive position amongst the people of Kashmir right from 1931 when he began the fight against autocratic rule of the Maharaja.

Whenever there has been unrest, turmoil, civil strife and rioting in Kashmir, the reasons behind it have been seen primarily in bad government and maladministration. There has been a preponderance of nepotism, corruption, black-marketing and lawlessness

in the Government. And to top it all, religious fundamentalism came to the fore as an instrument to challenge these unhealthy trends.

People remembered the better governments of Sheikh Sahib (1949-1953), Bakshi Sahib (1953-1964) and Sadiq Sahib (1964-1971), which were committed to the ideal of building a "New Kashmir" and a good administration. These periods of comparatively good government were free from excesses of corruption and nepotism. Later on, the administration began to collapse. Corruption and maladministration spread and the hydra-headed monster opened its fangs as if to devour the whole society. Whoever could lay his hands on ill-gotten wealth would not hesitate to amass it. The Indian saying "As is the king, so are the people" was truly applicable to Kashmir.

During my election campaign, I went from door to door, meeting people in their homes. What I saw with my own eyes was truly revealing. Very few people were amassing wealth by foul means, and there were groups of people engulfed by the devouring flames of poverty. Their homes were ramshackle hovels, old and dilapidated with the narrow lanes smeared with mud and filth. There were pot-holes filled with water and excreta from the open latrines. The snow that had fallen from the roofs had collected into mounds with spots of filth showing against the white background. The wooden electric poles were held by a jungle of worn out and old wiring. It was apparent that the wiring had been repaired and cut several times. One wondered how people could get any light at all under these precarious conditions. This was the physical environment outside. And inside it was no better.

"Tak - Tak - Tak"

"Who's there?"

"Please open the door. I would like to talk to you."

My knock on one door caused windows to open in the nearby houses, all located in a cluster, huddled together wall to wall. When curious women's eyes saw a woman moving about they showed some surprise and happiness. Someone said "It's a lady, fighting elections for the first time. And why not? After all there must be representation for women as well."

A door would open and many women from the Mohalla would come out from their homes and collect around me in the narrow muddy compound or inside one of the homes. They listened with curiosity and interest to me and enquired.

"Our lanes would be repaired? You think there will be water in our taps?" They asked earnestly.

People had many problems, scarcity of firewood, charcoal for fire pots, rations of food, the filthy lanes, and the poor drainage. Unemployment was on the rise and people did not have useful work to do. There was despair written large on their faces. I could see people were cynical and sarcastic with just one question on their minds. Will their growing problems ever be solved?

"Once you get the vote, you will never come back to see us again", many complained wherever I went through the dilapidated lanes and streets. I would get tears in my eyes observing the pitiable condition of penury and poverty of the people. My heart became heavy. Four to five people, sometimes even more, of a family were huddled together in dark, damp and dingy rooms, rapped in *phirans* (woollen cloaks) and warming themselves with fire-pots. They just while away their time when there is no work to do. Often women would be working, washing pots and pans in the ice cold water at the public stand post in the lane, or cooking for the family. It seemed to me that people didn't see the dirt and filth. They were oblivious of its existence. If they did perceive it, they didn't seem to bother. They appeared unconcerned with the goings on around them. When I probed their minds a little they blamed the Government for their woes:

"What did we get after all this education we had? No work? No employment. There is only frustration all-round." This was what the youth spoke in anger.

People were convinced that the root cause of their plight was the Government. And the State Government, unable to apply its mind to the amelioration of the poverty of the people, also needed a scape-goat and blamed the Union Government at the Centre. This vicious game playing was beginning to become a convenient habit for politicians to exploit.

In the election fray this time, there were parties based on religious fundamentalism. Jamat-i-Islami was in the forefront of these organizations. This party had begun to exploit the educated and frustrated youth and lure them to their fold with idealistic and sweet dreams of a wonderful future. Their election plan was based on religious puritanism and utopian achievements, if ever they came to power. Its essence was thus worded and spread from mouth to mouth: There will be plenty for all. Poverty will vanish; there shall be no unemployment, corruption will be rooted out. Drinking will be prohibited and people will not indulge in evil deeds. Everybody will offer *namaz* (prayers) five times a day. Indeed Nizam-e-Mustafa (lord's own system) will be established in Kashmir for the benefit of the people! In general, most people were not impressed by these pronouncements. But the frustrated unemployed and neglected youth did indeed find a ray of hope in this recently evolved fundamentalist creed.

There was another aspect of this development: the role of the rural population of Kashmir. The village folk of Kashmir had woken up after centuries of slumber. The movement for independence and establishment of a "New Kashmir" was begun by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah in 1931. It had stirred up the populace in towns and villages alike. Handing over land from big landowners and jagirdars to the poor tenants was a revolutionary step taken by his government in 1947. Education was made free and readily available everywhere in the valley. A lot of young people moved to the towns in search of work other than their traditional occupation of agriculture. Their goal was mainly seeking government employment in order to live a better life.

Over these years, life in Kashmir had developed many obvious inequities. City life was different; there was more glitter and glamour in the shops, boys and girls moved around freely, often together, women's education was common and educated women were active and visible. The spoken language of the people showed basic environmental influences and one could understand the person's background from the way he spoke, no matter, how much one copied city ways, the unsophisticated streak of rural background would always show. The suppression and subjugation

tion of a thousand years or more, both in the towns and the villages had vanished and a new assertiveness was being displayed by the people. Upstartish and vulgar behaviour was not uncommon. The rural educated youth suffered from a deep-seated inferiority complex.

The Jamat-i-Islami was precisely in search of an opportunity to exploit this youth, and here they got an ideal ground to achieve their ends. They were lured to their fold. By argument, worded in polished and idealistic language, they captured the minds of these young people, convincing them that if ever their problems were to be solved it was possible through Islam alone. The simplistic propaganda at their centres would be on the following lines:

“As long as Nizam-e-Mustafa is not achieved, we shall remain backward. These inequalities, corruption, maladministration, and nepotism are due to the absence of a truly Islamic Government. We must strive to achieve an Islamic State, whatever the sacrifice.”

The propaganda would be laced with beautiful stories from the historical past and supported with well printed and imported Islamic fundamentalist literature. The innocent rural youth found Jamat-i-Islami ideology a cure for their inferiority complex. They felt that this was the way they could go about achieving something. The party insisted on strict discipline, bringing all wayward youth into the party fold. There were prayers five times a day. New Arabic names were given to the young entrants. Leaflets were given to them for spreading their Islamic messages. People provided support for these activities with their contributions in the name of religion. Moreover, a lot of money began to come in from the Gulf countries for the propagation of Islamic thoughts and culture.

In spite of the vigorous efforts of the Jamat-i-Islami to bring people into their religious-political fold, they did not succeed. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah was so deeply associated with the nerve centre of Kashmir's politics, that no others could displace the people from the path shown by him. His mission was not over

as yet. He was living in exile outside the state, cut off from the people. How they wished to see him come back to them, free from the shackles put on him by the Government, and lead people to better times.

Kashmir has a unique culture of its own. There are four distinct seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Winters are spent mostly indoors. Even today one can observe the age old custom of the people celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, yagnas and deedars of saints and sufis of the valley. Their shrines are spread all over Kashmir and indeed every couple of kilometres you travel, you see a shrine or a mosque or temple dedicated to the good men and women who lived there.

The mountains of Kashmir have kept the people away and aloof from other parts of the sub-continent. Over the centuries oppression of many hues reduced the people to a tragic state of poverty. Their woes were never heeded by the tyrannical rulers, be they Mughals, Pathans, Sikhs or Dogras. And if even someone did pay any attention, it was often too late before their complaint reached the appropriate quarters for redressal.

For centuries, Kashmiris got used to the idea of seeing their new rulers arrive at the head of a marching army and ride roughshod over the populace. The new rulers would crush the people. Even women were not spared indignities of the worst kind. In those turbulent times of crisis, fear and turmoil, the saints and sufis provided them their only ray of hope for survival. With their loving words, songs and sayings, these good men healed the wounds of the downtrodden. People would turn to them for solace whenever confronted with personal, social or political problems. The sufis treated the people always with deep compassion and love.

The shrines of some of those famous saints and sufis are located at some of the most beautiful places of the valley. Every year on many occasions people congregate on these beautiful spots for prayers, thanksgiving, anniversaries and other fairs.

Kashmiris are also very fond of good clothes and good food. In

these fairs there are a variety of very special foods provided. These include, among others, fritters of sorts, particularly those made from lotus stems called "Nadermonji", sweet puddings and *luchies* (large, fried, leavened thin flour cakes), which people relish with gusto. People visit these shrines in large numbers wearing new clothes. They are popularly called "Jatris"(pilgrims). These "Jatris" are often seen in the spring before the sowing of crops and in the autumn after the paddy crop has been harvested. Among the many well known shrines are those of Dastgir Sahib, Tsrar-i-Sharif, Hazratbal, Reshi Peer Sahib, Mokhdum Sahib, Aishmuqam, Batmol Sahib, Bhagwan Gopinath and many others.

Whenever there is excess of rain or drought in Kashmir, it is a common sight to arrange mass prayers at the many shrines in the valley. In the heart of the capital, Srinagar, a thousand such prayers have been held at the shrine of Makhdum Sahib on the Hari Parbat Hill. It is a prayer to the lord of rains. People carry pots of water on their shoulders and sprinkle it over the steps, praying, singing and playing the Sumai, Dholak, and other drums. The prayers last many days until the wishes of the people are heeded. Simultaneously people cook yellow rice sprinkled with salt and mustard oil and distribute it amongst the people in every nook and corner. People relish this rice with great faith as a "Tabbaruq" ("Prasadam").

The changing seasons bring many fairs to this lovely valley. Almond blossoms in the spring attract lots of crowds, and amidst the scented environment, people spend time eating meals and drinking Kashmiri Kahwa or sheer *chai* steaming hot from their large samovars. These trips are picnics and pilgrimages combined into one which have become part and parcel of the Kashmiri ethos for centuries.

The fundamentalist propaganda has been quite contrary and, in vehement opposition, to these people's mind-set. The fundamentalists would criticize the practice of pilgrimage to these shrines, particularly the use of these spots for picnics and prayers. These practices were un-Islamic, they would preach to the people. Often, they would consider prayers at these shrines as idol wor-

ship and even go to the extent of condemning these practices as derived from the tradition and culture of the Hindus. Of course, these fundamentalists', intolerant views were voiced discreetly and surreptitiously, lest wrath of the people would visit the perpetrators of such attacks on their age-old beliefs. And if even they did go about their business openly they were always afraid of the people's hostility taking an ugly turn. It was not indeed possible to make people give up their beliefs and customs of thousand years in a moment. No wonder the influence of the fundamentalists remained confined to some rural pockets and a section of the educated youth.

The changing scenario in Kashmir had other visible aspects. Employees in the service of the government indulged in corruption with impunity, and would brazenly say:

"When our Ministers indulge in loot of the public exchequer, what crime have we committed in particular?"

The atmosphere was rife with rumours about the corrupt practices of the high and mighty in the state. Intellectuals and newsmen would discuss the issues in hotels and coffee houses. Indeed corruption in government was talk of the town everywhere. There would be humour and satire in plenty over the inefficient ways of the government, and vehement criticism of its manipulations.

Everyone in town talked about the big mansions built by corrupt people, the number of motor vehicles one owned, names of the people who had amassed huge real estate and landed properties, and even the volume of unaccounted money and gold held by some people in their possession. If you were to buy eggs in the market the shopkeeper would tell you, with a touch of sarcasm, that you can't get eggs anywhere in town.

"Why? Why? Is there such a shortage of eggs?"

"All the eggs in the market go to the Minister's house!"

"To the Minister's house!? Why?", I enquired.

"These are used for plastering his new house!", the shopkeeper would say.

Such situations had become routine. Milk produced from the

government dairies was supplied only to the elite in the government. Same was true about other supplies of household needs that were entirely under the control of the government.

On the other hand, the relatives of these lucky people were continuing to live in penury and privation. They would envy their rich relations and show it in their conversations:

"Listen! These are wonders of destiny. He used to go barefoot till recently. Impoverished, he would pine for pennies. Today he is a leader and minister, minting wealth with all his mite."

"I am thinking of getting a government contract, that would change my life."

There was rampant nepotism and many relatives of the elite became breath-takingly rich in a very short time. However, all this was not unknown to the people. They talked incessantly about these unwelcome goings-on.

I was terribly upset by this sad situation. When I jumped into politics, my perceptions were very different. Like any novice, I had expected everything to be clear and straightforward. Also, I was very disappointed when I compared the honesty and efficiency I had seen in England and Germany, with what I saw here. Corruption was the order of the day. For every encounter with a government agency, for rations, water, electricity or any thing one needed, one had to pave the way with money, or else had to have "Sifarish". In order to get rations one needed a whole day of waiting. So one had to be off work for the day and at the end of the day the task could still be unaccomplished. Knotty procedures were encountered everywhere. Greasing palms seemed to be the easiest way for people to protect and promote their interests.

Many people who did not get the opportunity to partake in this sordid drama were also engrossed in devising ways and means to amass wealth.

Thousands of years of poverty had created amongst the people of Kashmir a sense of impoverishment, resulting in an obsessive desire to fulfil these gaps. What did a Kashmiri possess till recently? He did not have enough to eat, nor much to wear even in the freezing cold. In Kashmir, only one quilt was available to the

whole family, come winter, come summer, and they would consider themselves lucky for possessing it. People lived like herds of cattle. Most people had no shoes, as a matter of fact people did not even know about such things! Due to the feudal land owning system, the people did not even get two meals a day. And most farmers and their families would often die of starvation.

Poverty and illiteracy kept people slow and ignorant and whoever wielded power succeeded in exploiting them. Unhygienic living conditions lead to poor health and widespread diseases. From time to time, epidemics would break out and take a heavy toll of human life and render habitations desolate. Ignorance and blind faith had gripped people's mind. Reason, wisdom, logic and reflection were obviously absent in these circumstances, and even beyond people's understanding.

People had not as yet forgotten these stark realities and were very conscious of their situation. A deep chasm was still visible and it appeared that it would never really be closed. Therefore they were envious when others grew rich overnight and developed an obsessive desire to amass wealth themselves.

Democratic Self-Government brought with it a large paraphernalia of economic planning, new developmental schemes and a number of projects. The Federal government and the Planning Commission provided abundant financial resources for implementing these projects. People who knew only stark poverty looked hopefully at the new opportunities for growing rich.

Simultaneously, there was parallel development. Educational opportunities were provided aplenty. New universities were established along with new professional colleges in engineering, medicine, law and journalism. These institutions trained and produced a new crop of educated professionals for new positions in all walks of life. Education was made free up to the highest level and fully subsidized by the State Government in urban and rural areas.

There was a proliferation of officers of the government. New departments were established and expanded. But all this did not necessarily lead to as much development as was envisaged. This was due to the misuse of resources and corruption by officers of

the State. Everyone sought to earn money by any means and dreamt of getting rich, whiling away their time in hatching schemes of self-aggrandisement. Constructive work suffered on account of negligence and corruption among the officers.

Another tendency also gripped the minds of the people. Doctors and engineers got rich too soon and acquired a new enhanced status in the society with abundant appreciation from the people. Their rich bungalows and motor cars became too visible. Everybody was enamoured of the professionals and wanted to see their children in similar circumstances of prosperity. To achieve this goal, the parents were prepared to stretch their nerves and efforts to any limits and sacrifice anything besides money, in order to get their children into these professions.

The changes in the socio-economic scenario were taking place rapidly. It seemed to be in nobody's power to stop this whirlwind. It became evident that corruption was spreading in society like cancer and those who could treat the disease were themselves victims.

I think whenever this cancer spreads amongst people there are numerous offshoots. Sycophancy, flattery, backbiting, jealousy, greed and acquisitiveness are typical characteristics.

Those belonging to the political outfit of the Congress (I) in the State were ruling the roost at this juncture. Through a number of devices of licensing and control as well as by obtaining large contracts from various public sector departments of the government, they were getting rich in dubious ways. To make matters worse, they would publicly brag about their methods and consequent successes. No wonder there was growing a new class of minions of fortune going about wherever one could see.

On the other hand, a large section of people, who were loyal and dedicated to the politics of Sheikh Abdullah, were feeling quite upset and sad over all this. They were longing to see the day when they could live a life of freedom and uprightness. However, a sizable number of people who were initially loyal to Sheikh Abdullah, had over the years, succumbed to the winds of change and joined the new currents in vogue. There were few others who

were waiting to see the day when Sheikh Sahib would finally decide about their future. They would accept his decision without any reservations as if it were a "firman" from God. They were wishing fervently to see the day when their regime would be in power.

After independence, democracy had made a beginning in this country, but the battle for the ballot had given rise to casteism, communalism, regionalism, and other vices in the body politic of the nation. The Congress party, which was in the forefront of secular forces at one time, was encouraging divisiveness amongst the people in order to garner their votes and hold on to political power in the states and the centre at all costs.

Such manipulative politics in the country could not leave Jammu and Kashmir undisturbed. The Jamat-i-Islami had begun to take roots and now that this party also had sought to win votes in the election, it indulged in vehement propagation of its Islamic fundamentalistic creed. Understanding the desires of the people, the leaders of the party began a campaign promising people everything short of Utopia. The burden of their song was that if Jamat is voted to power they will provide people an excellent system of government and thereby fulfilling their every need and desire. They ascribed all the ills of society to the misrule of the Congress(I) government in the state. And if there was any way out, it was the Jamat-i-Islami which alone could provide an Islamic government, based on Islamic laws and usher in Nizam-e-Mustafa in the state. However, with all this appeal to the religious sentiments of the people, the Jamat-i-Islami party was able to win just five seats out of the total of seventyfive in the assembly elections of 1972, which was a sizable gain considering the recent growth of the party.

Chapter 3

Sheikh-Indira Accord

THE turmoil in Kashmir overwhelmed the state to an extent that the valley, which was known as a "Rishi-Vari" was now becoming an abode of corrupt people, sycophants, and downright rascals. People who had access to the high and mighty in the government hierarchy were doing well, while others who were not so privileged were dependent on God's own mercy. Cultivating influential people had become an art and many men and women spent precious hours visiting their homes for favours and recommendations. If they succeeded in winning the hearts of these people in power their work would be done, while if they failed to do so, they were ridiculed, snubbed and shown the door. Many were distressed to see the degradation in our values and character.

We had one thing in common, there was one question uppermost in our minds: "How to save the state from total anarchy and disruption?" To answer this question one had to look around and carefully take many steps.

One thing was obvious to any observer. No solution to the problem could be feasible without the participation and involvement of Sheikh Abdullah, the uncrowned king of the people's hearts. He was a leader par excellence whom the Kashmiris trusted and loved. He was their only saviour who had awakened the people from a deep slumber, and had made them believe for once, that they were human beings and not a herd of cattle. For the Kashmiris his leadership role was as great as that of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru for the country. Sheikh Sahib's words and deeds were like talismans for the people. Although outwardly people were affiliated to political outfits of various hues including Jamat-i-Islami, yet deep down in their hearts they

only revered and loved Sheikh Abdullah.

It was therefore the opinion of all well meaning people that Kashmir could only be saved from impending cataclysm by the leadership role of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah.

Sheikh Abdullah had not been actively involved with the happenings inside Kashmir from 1953 onwards when he was removed from power as Prime Minister of the state. Most of the time he had been forced behind prison walls. Nevertheless, he moulded political events in the state considerably at crucial times in 1958, in 1964 and in 1968 making his presence felt for the good of the people and for the country's honour. Times had changed and the ongoing sociological revolution in the subcontinent had advanced its paces during these years. Recently Bangladesh had separated from West Pakistan and Sheikh Sahib had a better appreciation of the geopolitical realities in the region. Perhaps he too had realized that he could no longer be a silent spectator and see the state going downhill. In these circumstances it was exigent to bring Sheikh Abdullah and the government of India closer through some agency in order to enable Sheikh Sahib to join active politics in the state. Thus he could make his contribution to the political stability and economic development as well as eradicate corruption and other malaise from the administration.

Thus I got acquainted with Miss Mridula Sarabhai and all those people who wanted to see Sheikh Sahib back into mainstream politics so that he could guide the destiny of the people of Jammu and Kashmir towards progress and prosperity. Fortunately such efforts bore fruit. Very soon thereafter parleys and consultations were begun between Mirza Mohd. Afzal Beg on behalf of the Plebiscite Front, of which he was the chairman from 1953 onwards, and G. Parthasarthy, representing the government of India. The parleys lasted nearly three years and in February 1975 the Delhi Accord was signed between Sheikh Abdullah and Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India. Sheikh Sahib returned to the state triumphantly and was accorded a memorable welcome by the people of Jammu. He took over as the Chief Minister of the

State replacing Sayyed Mir Qasim of the Congress(I). The Congress (I) promised full support to Sheikh Sahib in the legislative assembly. A new chapter was thus ushered in the history of the state.

While the talks lasted, a lot of political activity was going on amongst the people to prepare the ground for an amicable accord. People were appraised of the possibility of an accord being signed by the Central government with Sheikh Abdullah. Those who had believed that the Sheikh's decision regarding the accession of the State to India in 1947 was not correct, and had sought to hold a fresh plebiscite on the issue, were tired of waiting so long without any success. They realized too that political activity and statesmanship were fading out fast from their midst, and that people were largely reconciled to a democratic system of government which had been established over the last two decades. And all these facts were also well known to the other group who were prepared to sacrifice everything in defence of Sheikh Sahib and his political stand. They wished to see an end to the political stalemate in the state, even though they recognized the futility of holding on to the demand for a plebiscite under the changed circumstances in the sub-continent. This was primarily due to the signing of the Shimla Agreement between India and Pakistan in 1972, whereby the two countries agreed to sort out their problems peacefully through bilateral discussions. This agreement between India and Pakistan made the issues in Kashmir an internal matter for India.

As the people of Kashmir perceived the winds of impending change, they vied with each other to put on a fresh cloak on their beliefs. Even those who had over the years changed their political loyalties and gone against Sheikh Sahib would now publicly proclaim:

"Not only myself, but my whole family are devoted to Sheikh Sahib."

"You don't know, I have not gone to jail once but many times over at his call," another would proclaim.

"I have suffered much torture during our struggles", yet another would say.

In fact, people were seen everywhere in clusters in the lanes, on shop fronts, inside workshops and offices, conversing on the subject and bragging about their nearness to and loyalty for Sheikh Sahib's cause. They would recollect and enumerate a catalogue of jail goings, lathi charges, and other tortures suffered by them over the years. Now that the government would be in their hands soon, they keenly desired to see some better days ahead.

The majority of people were quite excited about the accord and were generally happy. There was however, a hard core of people wedded to the idea of a plebiscite and were dreaming of merging the state with Pakistan.

Naturally, such people were not happy with the emerging situation. All the same, they did not want to lose this opportunity for power and strived hard to get on to the new bandwagon. However, the number of such people was not large. The atmosphere in offices, work places, shops and the bazaar was full of hope and optimism. Conversations invariably were around the shape of things to come.

The people's thinking and approach to events was different, more secular and definitely more participative in respect to mainstream political activities. They had also succeeded in bringing about changes in the thinking of their followers as well. There was indeed a real change in values and political ambitions of the fast growing middle classes over the past twenty two years.

Among these privileged classes there were many who were totally opposed to any rapprochement between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah. They thought and were also convinced that their privileged positions would henceforth have to be shared with a larger segment of people, even their status may be totally reduced. They would not hazard to guess when their opportunity for wielding state power would come again, if ever.

For this reason they were envious and sad. The one topic of conversation on which they harped repeatedly was that of the im-

pending accord between the two leaders.

"He thinks, he is a tall leader. Who does not want to wield power?", one would say.

"Yes, Yes, why don't you say plainly. He has now become greedy for power", another would clarify.

"Where are those promises of yours gone? What happened to the visions and dreams that were painted for us all these years?"

"We are back to square one after twenty two years! obdurate obstinacy! what are the gains?"

"He was getting unpopular with the people, and must have thought that the few followers left will also desert him. It is high time for him to get back political power and run the government."

"You don't know? It was Beg Sahib and Begum Sahiba who were keen about the accord. They were anxious to spend a few years of life in peace."

"Do you mean to say that others were not so inclined?"

"God knows why Madam Gandhi was so anxious for the accord? After all, everything was going on well here."

"We also learn that Sheikh Sahib's medical reports are not favourable. He has a serious disease and may not live for more than six months!"

"Who told you that? If that were so, it doesn't matter. Six months would pass in a jiffy anyhow."

"The medical reports were got examined in England and USA, they say. When confirmation of serious illness was received by Mrs. Gandhi, she decided to hand over the government to Sheikh Abdullah."

These were the conversations and rumours that made rounds in every home. Stories were invented—products of very fertile, intelligent and imaginative minds of the Kashmiri people. Whatever story would suit one's taste, would be passed on, thus adding to the productive rumour mill in the state. New stories, imaginative anecdotes and concocted versions of truth were the order of the day.

The adherents of the local Congress party, the Awami Action Committee of Maulana Farooq, and the Jamat-i-Islami made the

largest contribution in spreading these rumours and myths. If one party would miss out on something, the others filled in the blanks. Indeed, all of them were afraid of losing whatever little privilege and pelf they had acquired. They would pale into insignificance before the towering leadership and statesmanship of Sheikh Sahib who was a pioneer and forerunner along new paths.

These machinations by his opponents did not, however, have any effect on the ultimate outcome of the deliberations at New Delhi. Ultimately the talks came to fruition and the Delhi Accord was signed in early 1975.

In February 1975, Sheikh Abdullah took charge as the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. The Legislative Assembly of the state had a majority of members from the Congress party who had promised to give support to the new government led by Sheikh Abdullah. Sheikh Sahib chose his own cabinet of five who were not members of the assembly. They included Mirza Mohd. Afzal Beg, Mohan Kishen Tikku, Devi Das Thakur and Sonam Narboo from Leh Ladakh.

People had expected that Sheikh Sahib would reach agreement with the government of India only on the condition that the State's position as of 1953, when he had been dismissed as Prime Minister, would be restored. This would mean that he would be Prime Minister, and the Governor would be called the Sadar-i-Riyasat (President of the State). But lot of water had flown down the Jhelum in twenty two years. A number of elections were held to the Legislative Assembly of the state. Under the leadership of G.M.Sadiq, who was Chief Minister, the state Legislative Assembly had already passed legislation to eradicate the previous laws and thereby pull down the walls that kept the state away from the national mainstream. People had accepted these changes and were used to them. They had become aware of and experienced in the advantages of participation in mainstream politics.

When the accord was signed inspite of these reservations, there was a segment of people who got grist for their propaganda mills. They wanted to annex Kashmir through elections held in

the name of religion and through playing on the emotions of the people. Obviously they were tongue tied on the subject, but through rumours and malicious propaganda they spread their evil designs amongst the people. In these quarters I came across the following snippets of conversation.

"See, what a great fall he has had! The so called towering leader! Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed was the Prime Minister and he has accepted to be a mere Chief Minister!"

"If that was the way he wanted it why did he lose twenty two precious years?"

"The lure of power is too great a temptation for all."

"Power and pelf loosens everybody's self control. Everyone succumbs before power."

"Bakshi Ghulam Mohd. was better. He stood steadfast on one goal, one promise and one accord!"

"Bakshi's wealth, fame and power has lured them too."

"Indira Gandhi is a clever leader. She has enticed even Sheikh Sahib on to the right path."

"Where is the plebiscite? Where have those tall promises gone?"

"Why not make the best of the few years of life left?, he must have reflected."

"Well, man! if he didn't act the way he did, what would be the outcome? Who followed him now anyway? Those who followed him, and were prepared to die for him, they were now pursuing the Congress leaders. What else could he do if not accept the accord?"

"Of course, late Bakshi Sahib had rightly commented on the politics of Kashmiris!"

"What did he have to say?"

"Well, that four million people are with him and the same four million are with Sheikh Sahib!"

"This is a marvellous observation by Bakshi. People are for every leader for their own benefits."

After Beg-Parthasarthy talks, lasting over two years, the accord had been signed for good. Sheikh Sahib took over the Gov-

ernment at Jammu, the winter capital of the state. Soon there-after Sheikh Sahib paid a formal visit to Srinagar, the summer capital of the state, and the main city of the Kashmir Valley. As soon as his motorcade descended into the valley at Qazigund, huge crowds of people were waiting to have his "darshan" and applaud him. They lined both sides of the roadway on which the procession of cars was moving slowly. As he entered the city of Srinagar near Batwara, a multitude of people followed behind and he led the huge procession into the heart of the city, the historic Lal Chowk. Sheikh Sahib was accompanied by his Cabinet colleagues and many of his ardent party workers and supporters. Present in the historic gathering at the Lal Chowk were Mirza Afzal Beg, G.M. Shah, Salam Deva, Sonam Narboo, D.D. Thakur, M.K. Tikku, Hakim Habibullah, Hissam-ud-din Bandey, Abdul Ahad Vakil, Sheikh Rashid, Sheikh Nazir, G.N. Kochak, Mohiuddin Shah and numerous other political stalwarts all seated on or near the main dais erected for the Sheikh and other speakers.

People, old and young were moving towards the Lal Chowk as if going to an important fair. The congregation was huge, numbers difficult to assess. Every nook and corner was occupied. There were people watching from every window inside many large buildings surrounding the area including residences, shops, hotel and the rooftops thereof. There was movement and assembly of people in every lane and street leading to the Lal Chowk. It was an ocean of human beings moving and waving, jostling so much to reach the centre spot as if they were attending a political fair for the first time. Innumerable mothers put on the loveliest clothes on their children. And why not? After all, their beloved leader was amongst them again after twenty two years of suffering in the wilderness and in disagreement. The people believed their leader completely. He alone could do anything for them, he could take any decisions on their behalf, and even change their destiny. They trusted him fully. Indeed, he was the one who had sacrificed every comfort and personal desire for the good of the people. He had suffered imprisonment for many years and borne many humiliating tortures at the hands of the feudal monarchy.

All his life he had strived to ameliorate the lot of his people who were suffering from the abuses of poverty and slavery. He did every thing to uplift the people out of their drudgery. He was the guide, philosopher and friend of all Kashmiris and a pioneer statesman who had captured the hearts of not only the Muslims but also the Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists of the state. He was their beloved.

In my childhood, I had heard many stories about this great man, a courageous, self-sacrificing leader. In October 1947 during the invasion of the valley by tribals from Pakistan, he was the towering personality who had given a clarion call from the Lal Chowk calling upon the people of the state to resist the onslaught and be prepared to shed the last drop of their blood in defence of values held dear by them. Although a devout Muslim himself, Sheikh Sahib had dreamt of a secular polity for Kashmir which is based on universal human values rather than on any narrow faith, creed or religion. The tribal invasion of Kashmir aided by Pakistan hurt Sheikh Sahib immensely and he felt as if Kashmir had been robbed by marauders the way a dacoit grabs someone's belonging.

He also felt bad because of the desire of Pakistan to use all means including force, intrigue and deceit in order to annex someone else's home and hearth. In the interest of the principles and values he cherished and which were right for the people of Kashmir, he had sought military assistance from Jawahar Lal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India. Thereby the tribals and the Pakistani army had been defeated and forced to vacate the invaded areas. Before the entire state could be recaptured by the Indian forces there was a cease-fire and the United Nations took up the onerous task of vacating Pakistani aggression against which India had lodged complaint.

In those days all Kashmiri youngmen were called out on duty in defence of their motherland. They looked after civil defence in every lane and street of the valley. There were parades by those disciplined youth in their long files and everybody had these slogans on his lips.

"Sher-i-Kashmir ka kya Irshad? Hindu-Muslim-Sikh Itihad."

(What is Sheikh Sahib's order? Unity of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs.)

"Hamla-awar Khabardar! Hum Kashmiri hain tayyar."

(Beware invaders! We Kashmiris are ready to take you on.)

The raiders had committed acts of grave cruelty on the populace in Baramullah. Hindus and Muslims alike were killed. Many Hindus and devout Christians had been singled out for cruel treatment. Sheikh Sahib was distressed over these events. He never subscribed to the politics of dividing nations and states on the basis of religion. This was the foundation stone of his political philosophy.

In Hindu households they would often say that it was Sheikh Sahib who prevented bloodshed in the state when the entire sub-continent comprising the new India and Pakistan was laden with the corpses of millions of people, in rows upon rows, awaiting final disposal at the cremation and burial grounds. People of all hues were torn asunder in the turmoil of the partition of the country. There was a whirlwind of disaster going through India and Pakistan, but Sheikh Sahib not only prevented such an ominous situation from taking place in the state, but also proclaimed the doctrine of communal amity, unity and human love to combat the prevailing evil forces of hate and communal violence. He wanted the people in the state to live like brothers and participate fully in the tasks of development and progress in the state and the country.

Truly Sheikh Sahib was a lion of a leader. Confidence and courage, fearlessness, empathy and sensitivity were his outstanding qualities. Whatever Sheikh Sahib considered logical and correct for the good of the people, he would set to achieve successfully. Many people would feel puny in his towering presence.

Therefore, the people were hopeful that after twenty two years, with Sheikh Sahib back in the saddle of government, their miseries, poverty and tough days were over. Their hearts overflowed with love for the great leader and they were eager to have his "darshan". That unbounded love brought thousands of them to the Lal Chowk in an unending stream.

The square was packed to capacity and as far as one could see

there was only an ocean of human heads visible everywhere. People were keen to hear the leader. They were aware that Sheikh Sahib had taken a thoughtful decision and was eager to see that Kashmir progress like the other states of the country. The people knew only too well that compared with the financial inputs into the state the progress and development had been minimal. On the other hand quite a few people had become rich beyond expectations and the vicious evil of corruption and greed had gone beyond limits. Whereas there was some hope of redemption now, it would be impossible to curb this evil.

Many political personalities addressed the audience and the people listened eagerly. They were enthusiastic and were getting impatient to hear Sheikh Sahib. After others including Mirza Afzal Beg had spoken it was Sheikh Sahib's turn to address the assembled crowd. As he began to speak, people raised loud slogans "Sher-i-Kashmir Zindabad", which resounded in the sky and there was a loud applause. Sheikh Sahib dwelt upon the political situation in the state and declared that he had been called upon to take up the reins of the state government which he could not easily ignore. A new phase of development and progress would be ushered in the state, so that it could reap the benefits like other states of India. He made it clear that the amendments made in the constitution after 1953 will be reviewed and examined and those which are considered unsuitable shall be revoked. While saying so he pointed towards two of his Cabinet colleagues, D.D.Thakur and Soman Narboo and declared that he had brought these "golden sparrows" from Jammu and Ladakh respectively. He thanked the audience for the love and confidence shown by them throughout. Amidst tumultuous applause the proceedings came to a close.

It was decided that the Plebiscite Front, formed in 1953 and presided by Mirza Afzal Beg, be dissolved and the party rank and file alongwith the leadership revive and join the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference which was the political party earlier founded by Sheikh Abdullah in 1938, and nurtured by him up to 1953, before his dismissal from the government.

Chapter 4

Plebiscite Front Dissolved

IN the month of June 1975, the President of India declared national emergency in the country. Immediately thereafter sweeping arrests of political opponents were made throughout the length and breadth of the country. But thanks to Sheikh Sahib the emergency had no adverse consequences in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. For the moment we had one political party, one leader and only one slogan.

In the same period, D.P. Dhar, one of Sheikh Sahib's former colleagues in the National Conference and a Minister in the Central Government, died suddenly due to a massive heart attack. His unexpected and untimely death at a young age was a matter of great sorrow for the Kashmiris. D.P. Dhar had played a useful and crucial role in bringing about the present accord. His entire life had been devoted to political activity and prior to his death he had manned some very vital assignments in the Government of India. Having been a member of the erstwhile National Conference, and subsequently of the Indian National Congress, he was well known and popular amongst the people. Dhar's funeral and last rites were performed in Srinagar with state honours. Sheikh Sahib personally supervised the funeral arrangements and took part in the funeral procession which winded its way slowly from Gupkar road to the cremation grounds at Karan Nagar, a distance of about five kilometres. Thereby Sheikh Sahib once again rose far above the crowds and set a rare example of inestimable value in political conduct.

It may be recalled that way back in August 1953, D.P. Dhar was also involved with leaders like Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, G.M. Sadiq, Mir Qasim and others who had parted company with Sheikh Abdullah and had brought about his dismissal from the

state government. But Sheikh Sahib ignored these personal considerations and gave an abundant demonstration of his humane and magnanimous personality. He did not allow any personal or political vindictiveness to interfere in public affairs.

The administration of the state received a shock treatment as soon as Sheikh Abdullah came at its helm. It woke up suddenly from a long slumber. Fear gripped the mind of those who had been negligent, corrupt or inefficient. They were apprehensive about their fates, afraid that they would be found out and punished. There was a spate of surprise checks in offices by the Chief Minister, his Cabinet colleagues and other senior officials. List of government holidays was amended and curtailed. Unpaid state taxes were soon realized from erring businessmen and shopkeepers. In order to improve the general tone of city and town life, all business establishments were directed to give a new face-lift to their premises and paint and repair them. These had been neglected for years. Many officials who were known to be corrupt were suspended and eventually retired from government services. Others who had been guilty of indulging in improper or corrupt conduct were kept under severe vigilance and divested of key portfolios under their charge.

Of late the discipline in schools and colleges had touched a new low. Cheating, bribery and malpractice was rampant. Students were more often on a rampage than attending their studies in classroom. Question papers relating to examinations were leaked out and sold in the open market, days before the exams started. Examiners were involved in this racket with other officials. Rates were fixed according to the number of questions leaked.

The result of all this was that good students who would put all their heart into studies, would suffer incalculable harm. Far from getting well deserved marks and positions, they would often pass in the 3rd division, while others who never made the grade in house exams, would pass the finals in the first division. Such success would enable these students to further their objective of easily getting into higher technical, professional and university education.

There was a hue and cry in the public against these abuses.

This was the topic discussed with anguish in every household. People believed that anyone with enough money could even buy good success in examinations. Money became the *sine qua non* of every action. Matters did not end here. Students were cheating in the examination halls and copying their answers from open books with invigilators turning a blind eye.

Sheikh Sahib wanted to curb these evils ailing the younger generation. He stopped all this forthwith and brought discipline into academic institutions and amongst the staff by stern administrative action.

The earlier regime headed by Mir Qasim had appointed many teachers in schools whose credentials and qualifications were questionable for such academic work. How could such people train and educate the younger generation adequately? Therefore, education had merely become a means of acquiring requisite certificates in order to facilitate subsequent employment in the government services. The consequences of inefficiency resulting therefrom were obvious.

Now that the earlier ruling political parties were in the opposition, they had a field day criticizing the actions and policies of the government led by Sheikh Abdullah. They went to the ridiculous extent of saying that by taking these harsh actions the Sheikh wanted to curb the growth of education amongst Kashmiri Muslims. In spreading such rumours and disinformation the Action Committee led by Maulana Farooq, and the Jamat-i-Islami were in the forefront. However, such propaganda did not cut much ice and it was generally not taken seriously by the people.

After the dissolution of the Plebiscite Front the National Conference was properly organized and its branches established all over the state. This task was not difficult because the party framework of the Plebiscite Front already existed and giving it a new direction was easy. I joined this revived organisation in September 1975. Although I was not familiar with the procedures and modus operandi of the party, it did not take me long to apply my mind and get the know-how of party affairs.

I vividly remember the first time I attended the party meeting at its famous headquarters at Mujahid Manzil in Srinagar. There

was a large congregation of party workers present. I did not know many of them personally. I enquired from the janitor about Ali Shah who was the president of the Srinagar District of the party. "Where could I meet him?" He pointed towards a door. As I entered through the door I saw a small room furnished with a few chairs. There were a few people present. On seeing me they were taken by surprise. Ali Shah didn't fully realise who I was. To save him embarrassment I put out my hand for a handshake saying, "I am Khemlata Wahklu. I received your letter some time back." As I said so, he got up from his chair and with some hesitation shook my hand and welcomed me. I sat in a chair next to him and noticed a flush on his face while he also wiped his brow. He was the District President. Other people sitting in the room were also quite curious. When I greeted them and held out my hand they all shook hands with me one by one and warmly welcomed me in their fold.

Soon after formally joining the National Conference, I called on Sheikh Abdullah at his residence for a courtesy call. He was happy to see me and said, "Kashmir is a backward state, we have to uplift people here and help them to get rid of ignorance, poverty and corruption."

"Now that you are back again to shape our destiny, people have the opportunity to keep their head high and work towards this end. With your guidance people's lives will turn a new leaf", -- I replied.

"Ladies like you can make a valuable contribution and this is an important task, you have to do a lot of work amongst women here. They have to be relieved from financial and social disabilities", Sheikh Sahib added emotionally while he continued to speak:

"Kashmir was a famous land in the sub-continent. That was a long time ago. The fame of this land was spread all over the globe and famous women of this land have contributed a lot to the great heritage of Kashmir."

I heard him with rapt attention and then changed the subject by reminding him about the letter I had written condoling him on the passing of Mridula Sarabhai. I had not received a reply from

Sheikh Sahib to that letter. He smiled and said, "This is no time for mourning. It is a pity she is no more. She worked so hard for the accord and sadly she didn't live to see this day."

At this time I also met Begum Sheikh Abdullah for the first time. In her I saw the image of a noble and loving mother. While talking to her I realized how keenly she was helping Sheikh Sahib in the stupendous task of uplifting the people of Kashmir out of the morass of doubt and diffidence. In particular, Begum Abdullah expressed her deep anguish about the plight of the women, who were subject to much social injustice. She was very keen to bring women forward in order to enable them to face these challenges confidently. She was keen to see more women become literate, educated, and self-supporting. Although, some progress in this respect had been made over the years much more needed to be done. "Time has shown that our approach has yielded results", she concluded with these remarks.

On December 10, 1975 I was called to attend a meeting held at Jammu. The agenda included discussions on civil supplies in the valley during winter. Sushital Banarjee, being the Chief Secretary to the government was present in the meeting where National Conference delegates from various districts of the state were attending. Besides the cabinet colleagues of Sheikh Abdullah, Minister of State G.M.Shah (son-in-law of Sheikh Sahib) and G.N. Kochak were also present in this meeting. The meeting was held in the large committee room of the civil secretariat in Jammu. Participants were meticulously dressed for the occasion, and those who were attending such a meeting for the first time, were obviously jubilant with a flush on their faces. Outside the hall delegates were embracing and congratulating each other. After twenty two years they have had their own government again, which was a matter of satisfaction for everyone. I was part of this celebration and witness to this strange drama.

As the meeting concluded every participant received money as travelling allowance for their journey. Sheikh Sahib listened to everyone patiently and attentively during the meeting. Every member was vociferously advocating the urgency of needs of his

own constituency. Indeed members were vying with one another to impress the government with the gravity of their constituents' needs.

I have not forgotten the particularly vociferous performance of Abdul Salam Deva from Anantnag. There was more rhetoric in his speech than substance in respect of public demands. Among other things he said,

"After years of struggle and striving, we want to give some relief to the people, who have borne the cruelties of caning, beating, prison and bullets perpetrated by inhuman rulers. Those people now deserve to spend their lives in peace and happiness, those who have given proof of their love, loyalty and sacrifice by suffering many privations over the last twenty-two years."

Interrupting Salam Deva's speech, Sheikh Sahib smiled and said, "Well! we all know what you are saying. Why don't you come to brasstacks, and be specific?"

Sheikh Sahib said this in his own peculiar style and the members in the hall laughed. Mirza Afzal Beg, who was also present then observed: "Salam Sahib, you want that during the winter, District Anantnag should have ample supplies of rice, sugar, oil etc." He was attempting to help Salam Deva to be specific.

Other members presented their demands in a similar manner. Everyone was highlighting his sacrifices made for the party, and the amount of clout he possessed with the people in his district.

By now I knew many party stalwarts and they were equally familiar with me. After the meeting we went to see G.M. Shah in his room. He was keen to receive feedback from us on the public mood. In a very cheerful mood he said, "These people kept us in the wilderness for years. Now you will realize that the government is our own. We can get things done now!"

"Insha Allah!", said everyone in one voice. Many talked about the pending cases in the secretariat which needed attention, and Shah Sahib noted down the requests.

That was the beginning of a new set-up.

In April 1976 the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference called a large convention in Jammu. Delegates from every corner

of the state came to Jammu to attend the meeting. The weather was warm and pleasant and this was a political fair held after a long time. Many matters were to be discussed at this convention. Congress (I) and N.C. were still in the honeymoon mood and, therefore, the political climate was equally congenial.

Workers had traversed long distances on foot to join the occasion. Crossing rivers, coming down steep hills and travelling over the thorny paths of the Himalayan foothills, they had come from distant villages. There were innumerable buses and cars, bringing people to the convention. People from all castes and creeds Gujars, Bakarwals, Gaddi, Rajputs, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs came in their hordes. So large was the movement of people within and towards the congregation that it would not be an exaggeration to call it a river of human beings approaching the sea.

Invited to the convention were some political stalwarts like Maulana Masoodi and Mohi-ud-din Karra, who were in the forefront of the political struggles launched by Sheikh Sahib earlier in the period 1931-1946, but had later disassociated with his politics. Some close associates of Sheikh Sahib from the earlier days were also invited to attend this convention. In particular, these people had remained close to the Sheikh even while he was politically in the oblivion. A legal luminary and a gentleman par excellence, Mubarak Shah Naqshbandi was one such person who was in Jammu to attend the convention.

The convention was to last two days, and was held in the Idgah grounds at Jammu. Countless faces were having a profound "darshan" of their leader with the firm belief that their days of misery were going to be over soon. The dais for the meeting was so large that at least sixty people could be seated. Amongst the many leading people sitting on the dais, there were Sheikh Abdullah, Mirza Afzal Beg, Begum Abdullah, G.N.Kochak, G.M.Shah, G.M. Bhadarwahi, M.K. Tikku, Babu Parmanand, Salam Deva, Abdul Samad Teli, G.M. Shonthoo, Mohi-ud-din Shawl, Hissam-ud-din Bandey, Ghulam Mohd. and Bhat. There were also many junior ranking leaders on whose persuasion thousands of people had congregated at the venue coming from long distances.

The Idgah ground was filled to capacity by the people sitting under the "shamianas". Hundreds of workers were busy distributing drinking water to the people who were thirsty. Hundreds of fans were blowing to keep the air cool within the area. Many leaders sponsored resolutions which were approved by the delegates unanimously. Speeches were made by many political stalwarts. They referred to the events of the past two decades and talked about the accord signed in 1975 and the prosperous future these developments could bring about for the state. Everybody welcomed from the core of their hearts the ushering in of the fruitful phase of the new Kashmir movement, which was the foundation stone of the struggle of the National Conference almost five decades ago.

The press had a special area to themselves in the "shamiana" and quite a few leading media persons of the state were amongst those seated. From the pandal where I was I could easily locate R.K. Kak a towering and leading journalist of the state for half a century. He was sitting next to Mubarak Shah Naqshbandi whom I mentioned earlier and who was my next door neighbour at the time. I could recognize many other flushed and excited faces in the press enclosure and elsewhere.

People connected with social and political affairs of the state were indeed all happy, and acknowledged that the accord signed by Sheikh Sahib was the right decision. Those aloof from power and status for long, were the masters of the show today holding the strings of power in their own hands. They could get done anything they wished for.

There is no doubt, the people of Jammu and Kashmir are peace loving. Their centuries old faith in places of religious worship and the "mazars" of sufi mystics is as firm and strong as ever before, like the mountains around them. By and large, they like a good living. They become angry readily, but equally they can forgive and forget soon after. Although they are likely to be easily misled by shrewd people, it doesn't take them long to see through the game and understand the reality.

People of the state were well aware of Sheikh's steadfast faith in God which was well known. Therefore, people appreciated

every decision taken by him as ordained by God.

As the speeches were going on G.M. Shah whispered to me and enquired, "Lataji, shall I include your name in the list of speakers?"

"If you think it is proper, please do", I replied.

"Of course, you can't make do with English, German or Kashmiri here. You'll have to speak in Urdu", he cautioned.

"I will try", I said.

I guessed G.M. Shah and some other colleagues in the party thought that I couldn't speak as well in Urdu as I did in Kashmiri. I don't know how they had drawn this conclusion. Of course, they knew that I had returned from Germany a few years ago and could also speak German. Besides, I had spoken only in Kashmiri at the meetings in Mujahid Manzil where most workers were Kashmiris.

It was now my turn to make a speech. My name was just announced and it took me a few moments to walk to the mike from where I was sitting. I got the mike adjusted to my height with confidence and ease, and began to speak.

Addressing Sheikh Abdullah, Mirza Afzal Beg, and Begum Abdullah by name, I named other respected leaders present. Thereafter, in my speech, I stressed two important aspects. One was the eradication of corruption from our system and the other was the accord. Corruption, I said, is a severe kind of cancer in our society. It is to eradicate such evils that Sheikh Sahib decided to take up authority again. To emphasize the point. I said "This cancer of corruption is so widespread in our polity that without a bribe even wives don't nowadays feed their husbands and children. She wants some cash in her lap before she cooks!"

Not only did all the leaders laugh over this remark, but the entire audience was roaring. I remember vividly. Later I stressed the importance of the accord, and the new phase in the political life of the state under the leadership of Sheikh Sahib. With that I finished my speech.

As I moved to take my seat, Sheikh Abdullah signalled me to come near him. Thereupon he said, "Very good, you have explained the issues very well indeed. Where do you stay in

Jammu?", he enquired. "I live with my sister", I replied.

"Do you have a conveyance?", Sheikh Sahib asked with delight quite evident on his face.

Signalling to another person on the dais he directed, "Send her home in a car." Turning to me again Sheikh Sahib said, "Kashmir needs more women like you."

As I heard these compliments, I moved on to meet Begum Abdullah who also congratulated me. At the end of the meeting, as I left to go home, many other colleagues hailed my performance.

I am still not certain what excited the audience about my speech. What I said made everyone happy. It could be that most people wanted to say the same things. Also, perhaps it was a surprise for the audience to see a woman speak forcefully and fearlessly in this otherwise male dominated political arena.

When I returned to Srinagar a few days later, our neighbour Mubarak Shah Naqshbandi called on us and conveyed his felicitations to me and my husband. "Your wife gave an excellent speech", Mubarak Shah told my husband. Addressing me he said, "You should have been a lawyer. You argue so well. Of course, I am not surprised, you're an advocate's daughter!" The well known journalist R.K. Kak also congratulated me on the phone the same day.

Chapter 5

Sheikh at the Helm

IN 1976 summer I accompanied G.M. Shah and G.N. Kochak on a political tour of the district Anantnag in the Kashmir valley. We visited Sali, Devsar and other nearby areas. There were large congregations of people everywhere and our motorcade had to pass slowly through a procession of people in every village. These processions were made even more colourful by the presence of folk singers and musicians playing on their drums and "shahnais" and young people dancing in rhythm. Slogans rent the air and resounded in the skies. As our car moved along at a snail's pace, people thronged the windows and thrust their hands into the car for handshakes with Shah and Kochak.

I appreciated the intensity of people's love and admiration for Sheikh Sahib, bordering virtually on his worship. They did not consider Sheikh Abdullah an ordinary human being, rather he was for them an angel who alone was destined to alleviate their suffering and poverty. As we approached the dais erected for speech making, the atmosphere resounded with slogans in praise of Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference. Slogans heightened enthusiasm and people shouted and lost themselves in the excitement.

As we approached the dais the crowds got into an unruly frenzy and virtually dragged and pulled us by our arms up to the dais. Seated there was Begum Abdullah who had arrived well before us. It was time to eat and a few of us were served some cooked chicken and "parathas" (Indian pan cake) in separate plates. A large quantity of food prepared for the occasion was available nearby and the others present pounced on and devoured the food fast, as if they had never had good food before.

Seeing all this I wondered, "Will we ever cultivate discipline in our country? When will people learn better ways, if ever? And

how?"

Wherever we went I noticed the numerous problems people had. No electricity, no drinking water, no canals for irrigating fields, no roads, no work for the youth, no schools, no teachers, no doctors, no dispensaries. An unending list of public demands and difficulties. On top of it we listened to the numerous personal, financial and social problems of the people. The written application was the common man's only tool to obtain redress of his grievances. The application represented a written statement of his numerous woes.

In every gathering we would collect a bundle of applications and all these would find their way into the civil secretariat at Srinagar. If God Himself were to incarnate on earth, even He would take a long time to solve all these problems to the satisfaction of all. But people believed Sheikh Sahib had the Alladin's lamp, and even a touch of his hand could eradicate their misery.

As evening approached we came to Anantnag where we met over supper at Salam Deva's residence. A large number of people met us there. The catalogue of grievances and problems was ever so large here as well: a job for someone's son, a route permit for a bus, promotion in government service, or some other benefit to yet another relative.

Before we took supper, Salam Deva signalled that it was time for "Namaz". So everyone got ready. I sat quietly in one corner and watched the body movements during the prayers. I reflected that during the long years of struggle and political imprisonment they had developed a deep faith in religion, and now they seemed to exhibit their rituals publicly in order to establish their credentials as good Musalmans. This was done to such extent that even while travelling on the national highways, G.M. Shah suddenly ordered the car stopped, came out, spread his small prayer carpet on the road, and offered his prayers there and then. Such exhibitionism bothered me, but I would not make any comment. In silence I watched. It was obvious to me that these practices were used more as shows rather than true religiousness.

On our return journey we talked in the car. G.M. Shah asked me abruptly, "After watching today's proceedings which leader

and which party do you think is dear to the people?" I smiled and replied, "Does this need any comment? Isn't it obvious?"

"There was a time when leaves eaten by insects showed Sher-i-Kashmir Zindabad written on them", said Shah.

"And the leaves untouched by insects had been pierced by five needles by the devout followers of the Sheikh during long nights under candlelight!" added Kochak to keep the conversation going.

"I don't recollect that man's name?" Shah Sahib enquired.

"If there were only one such person I could perhaps name him", replied Kochak indicating that there were lakhs of people who admired and loved Sheikh Sahib.

Listening to this conversation, I was taken aback. Surprised and curious, I asked, "Did the leaves eaten by insects, and the man made one's match in writing?"

"The leaves were all mixed up. And those who worked hard on the leaves night long, they spread word from door to door about the miracle observed by them!" clarified Kochak.

"The message spread like wild fire and everybody believed without questioning that every leaf on the trees had Sheikh Sahib's name etched thereon", added Kochak.

"Peoples' faith in Sheikh Sahib became even more steadfast. He alone is their only leader, they thought and believed such faith was God-ordained too", added Shah Sahib.

Time went on. People were happy with Sheikh Sahib's work. Conditions were improving and getting better. But something else was brewing. Members of the Jammu and Kashmir Congress (I) were getting ill at ease with the government of Sheikh Abdullah. Those who had wielded power for many years, and have had their finger in every pie, did naturally feel out of step with the new dispensation. Their irritation was understandable. They didn't feel happy sharing power. At the lower level of the party hierarchies in both N.C. and Congress (I) these feelings were acutely perceived which caused group tensions.

Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, was also facing a grave challenge from within the party as well as from the people

at large in the country. The declaration of emergency had led to unprecedented abuse of authority by the state apparatus leading to widespread resentment and criticism. She felt a grave threat to her authority. The J & K Congress (I) was at the same time clamouring to bring down Sheikh Abdullah again, but Indira Gandhi could not pay heed to such demands because of her own grave problems and apprehensions. Therefore, outwardly a semblance of peace and harmony between the two parties was projected to the people, although it was clear that the political tension was increasing.

Around these days there was a meeting of the N.C. at Mujahid Manzil. At this meeting the attitude of the Congress (I) towards Sheikh's government was criticized by many members. They expressed their anger and anguish over the fact that in every constituency of the state the political workers of the Congress (I) were harassing and pressuring them. Coming events had begun to cast their shadows on the political scene.

In February 1977 Babu Jagjivan Ram resigned from the Union cabinet. He declared that he would quit the Congress (I) immediately. This action by him had a grave and stupendous impact on the political situation, not only in the country, but in the Jammu and Kashmir state as well. There was understandable turmoil and activity in political circles. People saw the end of Congress (I) government at the Centre. And many in the state believed that if Congress (I) government goes at the Centre, Sheikh's government in the state would also face the same fate, particularly because the accord was between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah. This was the kind of logic that was making the rounds in Srinagar.

Subsequently the Indian Parliament was dissolved and new elections were declared to be held. Preparations for fresh elections began countrywide at the same time. Keeping in view these profound political developments, the Cong (I) and the N.C. went in for a temporary truce for the time being. Under this new compromise formula it was, therefore, agreed that out of the six seats for parliament from Jammu and Kashmir, Cong (I) will field its candidates for three seats, two from Jammu and one from

Ladakh with no opposition from N.C. Whereas N.C. will field three candidates from the valley of Kashmir with none opposing from the Cong (I). N.C. chose Begum Abdullah from Srinagar, Abdul Ahad Vakil from Baramulla and Mohi-ud-din Shawl from Anantnag for the parliamentary seats.

Begum Abdullah came to Srinagar soon after and I went to the airport to receive her. Her plane landed on time, I welcomed and garlanded her. I also congratulated her on being nominated as the N.C. candidate for the parliamentary seat from Srinagar. She was visibly pleased and said "We have to work very hard to win. There is no dearth of tough opponents."

"We will fight everyone vehemently. Nobody can hope to win against us", I responded with lot of enthusiasm.

The same day we had organized a large meeting of party workers at Mujahid Manzil in order to welcome the three nominated candidates of the N.C. including Begum Abdullah. The hall was packed to capacity. And there was a spate of speeches by the party stalwarts and leaders. Also present in the visitors gallery was a gathering of eminent journalists of local and national press. Begum Abdullah had been late in arriving at the meeting. We were getting impatient. G.M. Shah was visibly disturbed over this delay. He signalled to a worker and told him, "Please ring up Begum Sahiba, and tell her that the hall is jam-packed. Ask her to come quickly."

Begum Sahiba was called on the phone, but she was still taking a long time to come. Shah Sahib was rather annoyed and angry. Ultimately, when she arrived the hall resounded with slogans and the speech of the leader on the mike was lost in the din becoming inaudible. Unfazed Begum Abdullah sat down on the dais.

I realized that every member of the Sheikh household was afraid of G.M. Shah. While she sat, she explained to her son-in-law her reasons for being late while wiping perspiration from her face.

People had formed and carried the opinion about G.M. Shah that he was ill-tempered, prone to bouts of anger and used harsh language. Rumour had it that he had even ill treated his wife,

daughter of Sheikh Abdullah. This was a general opinion about a public person, exaggerated by political rivals and personal foes. In my contact I found G.M. Shah a good administrator. If ever he got angry or bad tempered it was in the interest of getting results expeditiously and impressing on political workers or officials the need for disciplined action in public affairs rather than for personal reasons. At times, however, I sincerely felt that he would get better results if he could avoid such occasional outbursts of bad temper.

Amidst loud applause the three N.C. candidates were presented to the audience. They were also formally introduced to the workers.

After many of us spoke to the audience, it was time for a speech by Begum Abdullah. She began her speech and waxed eloquent on the political role of the N.C. for four decades. She spoke for a long time. People listening looked tired and some sneaked out of the hall as well. Then Shah Sahib got up and requested her to stop, which she did abruptly. Next day I went to Mujahid Manzil again. The mood then was somewhat different. People were talking informally, speaking their minds without any inhibition.

"What was the need for nomination of Begum Abdullah for this election?" asked one worker.

"Was there no one else who could represent the party? Is it fair to drag her into the arena at her age?" queried another.

When I heard such conversation, I interjected, "Is it wrong to send women into parliament? Can't she represent us?"

"No, No, we didn't mean that. We are only wondering about her physical capacity, you know?"

"Well listen, why should the seat go out of the household?", another quipped jocularly.

At this point I had become well aware of group politics within the N.C. The above conversation was part of a whisper campaign by the group loyal to Mirza Afzal Beg, a lifelong associate of Sheikh Sahib, and his most loyal and trusted deputy throughout their political struggles together. But it was some satisfaction to me that everyone trusted me and spoke without hesitation about

such affairs in my presence.

During the parliamentary election campaign I accompanied Begum Abdullah on an electioneering spree in Srinagar and adjacent towns and villages of her constituency. We made many speeches, everywhere in the valley. There wasn't a place we didn't go: on roads; lanes and bye-lanes; on hills and mountain-sides; wherever people lived. We promised people that the dream of "New Kashmir" would be realized. People will be uplifted from poverty to a better life. In the speeches the country's polity of secularism, socialism and democracy were also explained at length and we promised to help in improving further the working of the system. In between speeches we gulped cups of tea, ate some food and had snacks, wherever we could manage it. At many places people offered us food with lot of love. It was a delight to receive these warm gestures from them.

In the course of these tours we went to the residence of Abdul Ahad Vakil in Sopore town. There we got to know members of his household. Abdul Ahad was a candidate for the parliament from Baramullah constituency. There was a lot of exchange of ideas on the election strategy. Special fish had been prepared for Begum Sahiba on the occasion. We had a good serving and thereupon proceeded for the public meeting in support of the N.C. candidate.

As we were returning from Sopore by car I and Begum Sahiba talked on various subjects including politics. She took out a small bottle of scent from her purse and sprayed it on her clothes and mine. "I am allergic to perfumes and instantly catch a cold", I said to Begum Sahiba. But she wouldn't listen. She sprayed perfume all the same, speaking at the same time.

"Dear daughter, always remember this, whether you are having a tough time or an easy one, in happiness or in misery, always go about with your head high. Never let yourself go under a cloud. People respect those who possess self-respect."

"Of course, we have to learn a lot from your vast experience", I added, keeping the conversation going.

"Times don't always remain alike. We have seen days when

we didn't even have enough curry to go with our rice. Those were tough times, but my children and I would go about, as if nothing had really happened", the Begum added.

"Sheikh Sahib was most of the time in jails. Did you feel free to go about? Were you allowed to?" I enquired.

"We were surrounded by police sleuths of the CID. Nobody would visit us because of fear", she replied.

We talked all through the journey and I heard Begum Sahiba delving deep into the past about how people had suffered, and about their poverty and ignorance. About what has to be done and so on. "Lot more remains to be achieved", she added with a sigh.

Begum Abdullah was fond of bright colored clothes and her shawls were full of beautiful embroidery. Over the topic of clothes she once observed, "As a person ages, her colour fades. And these bright clothes don't let her feel the change. Bright clothes give a feeling of good health and smartness by themselves. You feel confident. And of course, we have to mingle with the people. We must set an example to them."

During those few weeks I toured widely covering every nook and corner of the valley, working hard and sincerely for the success of the National Conference candidates. This was my cherished desire as I felt that it would enhance the prestige of the party in the new circumstances. I also observed that by working with people and mingling with them most of them came to know me better. Everyone, old and young, showed me a lot of love.

With the day of election over, results started pouring in within a few days. March 1977 became like dooms' day for Congress (I). The Congress (I) government at the centre was defeated so badly that it looked as if their return would be impossible for decades. Even Indira Gandhi failed to make it to the parliament. This was the situation at the centre. In Jammu and Kashmir, however, all the six candidates fielded by the N.C.-Cong (I) combine won the elections decisively. There was a wave of jubilation in the state. Begum Abdullah won her seat with an overwhelming majority.

There was an atmosphere of celebrations at the Mujahid

Manzil, with slogan-shouting and fire-crackers going on all through the day. There were crowds of youth dancing in the middle of the streets. In Jammu, Cong (I) was happy over their winning too. Although earlier on they were keen to oust Sheikh Sahib, they were under great pressure from Indira Gandhi against such postures, because she didn't favour this change at all. Now that Indira Gandhi herself had lost the election in March 1977, the Cong (I) in Jammu and Kashmir withdrew its support to the government of Sheikh Abdullah in the state Legislative Assembly which the Cong (I) dominated. Immediately thereupon Sheikh Sahib met the State Governor, Shri L.K. Jha and made a recommendation to him for the dissolution of the State Assembly. The Assembly was dissolved forthwith and within the twinkling of an eye the love of yesteryear between N.C. and Cong (I) turned into hate of the worst kind. People began to criticize and humiliate adherents of the Congress (I) everywhere. A growing tirade was unleashed against each other by the two rival political parties. The state came under Governor's rule until the next Legislative Assembly elections proposed to be held in July 1977.

There were only about three months to go till the next election. National Conference was now rid of Congress (I), and it was time for the N.C. to prove its supremacy and openly show its greater popularity and support amongst the people.

The three regions of the valley viz. Anantnag, Srinagar and Baramullah were awakened again. Now there was a scramble for party nominations for the election. At the party headquarters, and elsewhere at the residences of party stalwarts, there were crowds of people, party workers and minions, voicing support for one candidate or the other. Mujahid Manzil was truly converted into an arena where every supplicant for a nomination was trying his level best to show off his political clout in the concerned constituency.

All this was meant to impress on the top brass of the party the winning potential of the candidates.

Party workers would make a bee-line to the residences of Mirza Afzal Beg, G.M. Shah, and Begum Abdullah and put in their requests for the nomination of particular candidates. Large

numbers of party workers were brought to Srinagar in buses and trucks in order to demonstrate visible physical support of large number of people. Every potential candidate would advance his arguments emphasizing also the sacrifices he had made by way of going to jail, taken police beatings and suffered other difficulties during the long struggle of the party.

Sheikh Abdullah, Beg Sahib and G.M. Shah were to select the candidates. Of course Begum Sahiba was in any case to have a big say in making the nominations.

Afzal Beg Sahib was indisposed and I, along with Abdul Samad Teli, a prominent member of the Provincial setup of the N.C. went to look him up on April 5th. He was very happy to see us and talked to us freely. That day I realized where the true loyalties of Teli Sahib lay. I had heard something about it earlier, but today I could see it with my own eyes. What transpired in that meeting made me realize that Afzal Beg was not in favour of the candidature of Begum Abdullah for the Lok Sabha seat in the recently held election to the parliament. Beg Sahib said "I don't see what was the need to nominate her for this seat. Was there any dearth of young people?"

"Everybody wants all the eggs in one basket. And why not?", replied Abdul Samad with obvious allusion. All of us laughed over this remark.

"Now it's the problem of Assembly nominations. There is pressure from all sides", I told them.

"Yes, of course. And if they would only go that far! Well!", without completing his sentence Beg Sahib gave Abdul Samad a meaningful look.

"This time you must become the Chief Minister. And Sheikh Sahib must be a father figure like Gandhiji." I had hardly uttered these words when I saw a visible flush on Beg Sahib's face. My utterance appeared to have stirred a chord in his heart.

He said to me "This is rightly your task. Go and explain to Sheikh Sahib."

"I dare not explain to him. But I shall tell him. This I promise", I replied.

"He should not seek election to the Assembly", added Samad

Teli referring to Sheikh Sahib.

"This will indeed further enhance his stature and the party will stand to gain tremendously", Beg Sahib added.

I had generally not been inclined too often to talk to Beg Sahib. I don't know why. But perhaps he could not talk to a lady uninhibitedly. He would falter a bit, perhaps because he just didn't know how to talk with a female colleague. All the same, he carried a favourable impression about me and that was the reason that he divulged his innermost thoughts to me.

After a few days I went to see Sheikh Sahib. He was sitting alone in his large well manicured garden. I pulled up a chair near to him and sat down. Without wasting any time on preliminaries, I talked about the forthcoming elections. I was very keen to tell Sheikh Sahib that for a man of his stature it is not necessary to get into the fray of Assembly elections. But before I could say so he got into a rage over the topic of election itself.

"These Congress people have stabbed me in the back", he said with obvious pain and anguish.

"They couldn't have acted differently. We expected this." I told him.

"These people! Scum of earth! I raised them sky-high. They are used to eating leftover crumbs. Look how they stoop so low in achieving their ambitions", Sheikh Sahib said with anger and remorse in his heart. He gave the impression of being convinced that everyone in the world was out to betray him.

"People are with us. We will win the elections. Will deliver a good slap on their faces", I responded vehemently providing a healing touch to his unhappy state of mind.

"There is the problem of nominations, of pulls and pressures within the party", saying this he got into a deep reflective mood. Something was weighing on his mind.

"From which constituency are you contesting the election?", I touched on this subject keeping my promise to Afzal Beg in mind.

"Why? What is wrong with Ganderbal?" (Ganderbal is a few kilometres north east of Srinagar, and has been the pet constituency of Sheikh family.)

His reply was surprising and there was obvious irritation in his

voice.

"The entire state is your constituency. Even an insect can easily win an election under your benign umbrella." As I said this Sheikh Sahib's face relaxed, he smiled a little and said, "Insects are afraid of being crushed!"

I laughed over his remark. However, after sensing the mood of Sheikh Sahib I didn't venture to broach the subject of Beg Sahib's future role at all.

The newly formed Janta Party was triumphantly riding the success wave in the rest of the country at this time. There was a new enthusiasm amongst the people. With the formation of the Central Government under the aegis of the Janta Party, the governments in the states could also not remain unaffected. After the dissolution of the Jammu and Kashmir State Assembly, all the smaller outfits of various political hues formed themselves into a single party with the Janta label. This newly formed Janta Party of the state included Maulana Farooq, Chairman of the Awami Action Committee, Maulana Masoodi, a former veteran of the N.C. and a long time associate of Sheikh Sahib, Abdul Gani Lone, a former member of the Congress(I) and a former Minister in the Cong(I) government. There were other participants including some bright young men of the Youth Front. The leaders of this party were of the firm belief that they will be able to win this election willy-nilly. With this in mind their electioneering campaign began in right earnest. The workers were forcefully propagating their views with no holds barred. Sheikh Sahib tried to seek an understanding with the Janta Party at the Centre, but failed. He visited Srinagar on 7th April and was accorded a great welcome by the people.

The rallies and public meeting organized by the Janta Party were also massive. Their workers were able to collect sizable number of people from the villages as well. This development had its impact on the workers of the National Conference. We were convinced that the challenge of the forthcoming elections was formidable and that we shall have to work harder to win. Also it was realized that the votes likely to be usurped by opponents of the N.C. have got to be divided and brought into our fold.

The election strategy was given a fresh look. The party high command asked me to give a thought to the matter and on April 15th, 1977 I gave a well thought-out note with the title "A Tough Hot Campaign Ahead", to the party Executive Committee. The very important points brought to the notice of the High Command at this juncture are relevant to the later developments in the state. The gist is as follows:

"Jammu and Kashmir will go to the polls in a politically hot atmosphere in the next few months. This poses a great challenge to the National Conference. Poverty and backwardness are our bane and these have to be tackled. In Jammu and Kashmir the recent success of the Janta Party at the centre has led to the creation of a mushroom group of political activists who seek in this moment to try their luck and come alive again after being in oblivion for over two decades. It is natural for such people to try to impress the masses by harping on minor grievances, creating communal ill-will, and make capital out of small happenings here and there.

Our Party has faith in the people's wisdom and judgment. They know their interests lie safe with N.C. But complacency will be dangerous. People have to be educated about the issues. A revolutionary change has taken place in the state after a long and difficult period in our history. Reactionaries have retarded this pace of change. We have to forestall any attempt by these forces to mislead people by petty slogans, character assassinations, or by dubious appeal to their regional, communal or parochial loyalties.

Young people are the backbone of the country and they represent the future. Their activity within the party must be actively encouraged. They need positive response and encouragement from the party at all levels. Youth in the state are confused and show cynical indifference. They are more educated today than in 1931, but are politically totally in the wilderness.

The National Conference can provide a stable government. Opposition groups want to change all this. Big business, bureaucracy, and other vested interests who thrive on corruption have deliberately chosen to create instability, which provides these

people an unlimited opportunity to amass wealth and wield unlimited power over the people. The N.C. must close its ranks, differences of opinion notwithstanding. The dedicated and united leadership of N.C. alone can save the state from yet another spell of chaotic conditions hampering the state's economic recovery. Unity and cohesion within the party ranks must be strengthened. Trade union leadership must be influenced to come under the N.C. umbrella. The party must see to it that its programmes and actions are created by the intellectual groups, whose number, though small, is still very influential in shaping public opinion. A party in opposition is using this section and building up strong cadres. This can spread into rural areas too, particularly in concert with other reactionary forces. The press and other media are controlled by them, and they do influence peoples' opinion in more than one way.

The N.C. is poised for yet another massive victory. The challenge is tough. Everyone in the party must set high standards for himself and for his work in the coming months. The N.C. alone can win the hearts of the people. It will work dedicatedly to promote excellence and hard work in all walks of life. With unity, dedication and an excellent programme, we go to the people again for assured victory against the forces of reaction, opportunism and communalism."

The note was discussed by the Executive Committee and very much appreciated. The election strategy was by and large formally approved.

While the tempo of our activities was getting heightened, there was a little setback. On June 4, 1977 after his tour of the hilly areas Sheikh Sahib was taken seriously ill. He was bed ridden for quite some time. The news about his illness spread through the state like wildfire. People sitting on the fence now came rushing into the ranks of the National Conference. People's love, faith and devotion to Sheikh Sahib was always obvious, but this time these emotions surfaced like a flood wave. People came out of their homes and went into mosques, temples and gurudwaras to offer prayers for the speedy recovery of the leader.

The custom of making animal sacrifices and offerings in Kashmir is as old as its history and the same continues unchanged even today. The practice is common among Muslims and Hindus. Making such offerings is an important component of many religious festivals and important social functions. When a marriage is solemnized happily without any untoward incident the family goes to a shrine or a temple and makes an offering in thanksgiving. If someone is unwell, an offering is made in his name with prayers for his speedy recovery. Lately passing of crucial school leaving examinations by young people has also given rise to a spate of such thanksgiving offerings.

The sacrifice is mostly of sheep or fowl. The animal or bird is slaughtered into pieces and these are moved around, accompanied with prayers over the body of the person who is unwell. These pieces of flesh are then offered to God by distributing these to the poor and hungry, and sometimes to vultures. Thereby the person concerned receives blessings for recovery, so people believe. Hindus do not however, use fowl for the sacrifice. Instead they make do with the lungs and liver of sheep.

For Sheikh Abdullah people gathered in large numbers everywhere holding prayer congregations and meetings, later moving around in processions. In the towns and villages, they came out on the roads and sang religious prayers, thereby seeking God's blessings for the speedy recovery of the Sheikh. Thousands of sheep and fowls were sacrificed on these occasions. The entire population of the valley spoke with one voice and prayed.

The presentday mosque at Hazratbal was built by Sheikh Sahib to fulfil one of his cherished dreams. The shrine represents the resurgence of the Kashmiri spirit in the present age. The basic concept was formed by Habib-ul-Rahman, Chief Architect of the Government of India. Subsequently, architect Fayaz-ud-Din of Hyderabad finalized the design. The construction of the mosque was supervised by Mir Ghulam Rasool, Harvard graduate in civil engineering and retired Chief Engineer and Development Commissioner of the State Government. His devoted and former colleague Nila Kanth Hakhoo was the construction superintendent at the site from the foundation laying to the completion of the dome.

Mir Gulshan Rasool was instrumental in getting the architects to change the proposed Arabic dome into the now existing Indo-Islamic dome of the shrine. He also associated a large number of other professional engineers including many non-Muslims in the meticulous execution and supervision of the intricate cement concrete construction of the mosque. Mir Rasool was a close friend of Afzal Beg. Towards the end of his life Mir's relations with Sheikh soured and he died bitterly critical of Sheikh Abdullah for whom he had sacrificed a lot during the earlier struggles.

When the mosque was ready and thrown open to the public Sheikh Sahib had honoured Mir Ghulam Rasool and Nila Kanth Hakhoo and others before a large congregation at Hazratbal with ceremonial "Dastarbandi".

Chapter 6

Elections 1977

ELECTIONEERING began while Sheikh Sahib was still in bed. There was lot of activity everywhere. Wall posters flooded the streets. Manifestoes were issued by the contending parties. Hundreds of people were participating enthusiastically in the campaign, shouting slogans and seeking votes for their respective nominees. Their enthusiasm was mounting to a kind of frenzy. And every party was providing varied incentives and promises to attract people's votes for their candidates.

The Janta Party, which was a conglomeration of groups of various hues and backgrounds, had now come into the open. The party was opposed to the N.C. and its earlier accord with the Congress (I) government at the Centre. They found the occasion opportune to rouse public opinion against Sheikh Abdullah's policies.

They said : "By signing the accord Sheikh Sahib has betrayed his own conscience and shown lack of character. He has patched up with a party like the Congress (I), whose members he had dubbed as worms of a dirty drain. After being in the wilderness for twenty two years, he was lured by power and accepted to be a mere chief minister."

"Who is not attracted to power?"

"How dare he abandon that opportunity? He had seen others reaping untold benefits while the going was good for them."

The Janta party stalwarts from the centre including Jagjivan Ram and Charan Singh came to Srinagar to bolster the election campaign of their newly formed outfit in the state. Many people thronged to the airport to receive them and they were escorted to the city centre by a large procession of people. The Janta party leaders made enthusiastic speeches wherein they criticized the

N.C. as well as its leader Sheikh Abdullah. They also sang praises of their party as an alternative to the N.C in the state.

These speeches were the undoing of their party in Kashmir, because these left a deep wound on the Kashmiri's psyche. Their hearts were wounded without having to shed any blood. The people talked about their hurt sentiments:

"No doubt, we have some grievances against our leader. But does it behove Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram to cast aspersions on him? In particular, when he can't reply them from his sick bed?", they asked.

"Sheikh Sahib is a national leader. He fought shoulder to shoulder with Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad. Yet Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram didn't have the courtesy to call on Sheikh Sahib and enquire about his health", said others.

"Yes, I agree. They aren't setting any good example."

"They're making a farce of democracy."

"Let's see which way the wind blows now. They've ruined their chances."

"Kashmiris are very touchy on such issues", cautioned many people.

There was a wind of change after this episode. The wave against the Janta party became like a flood, a whirlwind which swept everyone in its way to the fold of the National Conference.

I recollect another event which made history. On 26th June, 1977, the Prime Minister of India, Morarji Desai visited Srinagar in connection with the forthcoming elections. I wanted to call on him on behalf of the N.C. But I learnt that on that day the Prime Minister was scheduled to attend a dinner in his honour at the residence of Maulana Farooq in downtown Srinagar. So I was asked to meet him the next day.

At the appointed time, the next day, Morarji Desai gave me a nice interview at the Raj Bhavan.

I told the Prime Minister emphatically, "Sir, there is a strong rumour in Srinagar that the forthcoming elections are being rigged. The members of the Janta party are openly bragging about this." Morarji Desai gave me a patient hearing and said "The Janta party is committed to having unhampered, impartial and clean

election, not only in Jammu and Kashmir but in every other state in the country. There can be no compromise on that." Morarji's firm and asse.tive reply made me accept his word on the controversial subject. After a brief pause, Morarji Sahib asked me, "How is Sheikh Sahib's health?" I told him about his illness and took leave of him. As I came outside into the lobby, I said 'Hello!' to Maulana Farooq who was waiting his turn to call on the Prime Minister. I realised that he was a little surprised to find me leaving the Prime Minister's chamber. We didn't talk much.

Thereafter I went straight to the residence of Sheikh Sahib where I met Sheikh Nazir, General Secretary of the N.C. Sheikh Nazir was looking after and nursing Sheikh Sahib. I apprised Sheikh Nazir about my interview with the Prime Minister and told him that the PM had assured me that the elections would be held impartially and no rigging would be allowed or tolerated. Hearing this, Sheikh Nazir replied, "We can't believe all this. They aren't trustworthy." This was a typical response in the growing atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion.

Next day, I went again to Mujahid Manzil in connection with election work. There I saw Ghulam Mohd. Shah involved in the management aspects of electioneering. He was assigning election work to party veterans and stalwarts as well as workers, preparing press notes, party manifesto, slogans and banners. Thousand other minor and major strategies were being planned, masterminded and supervised by him.

I was being requested by candidates in every constituency to address public meetings there. There wasn't a place I didn't visit during those hectic days.

As I came out of Mujahid Manzil and was about to drive home in my own car, a few women workers of our party gave me a signal to stop and said, "Lataji, would you please give us a lift up to Lal Chowk?"

"You get in behind", I signalled them. Three of them sat in the back seat and settled down. As I drove, I asked them, "I didn't see you for many days. What have you been up to?"

"We had been sent there", said one of them simply as if I knew everything.

"Where had you been?", I asked with obvious curiosity.

"To the residence of Maulana Farooq, where else?", one of them whispered into my ear.

"His residence? Why? What happened there?", I asked with some surprise.

"As soon as Morarji Sahib arrived there, women were singing welcome songs in his honour. We also joined them in chorus", said one.

"In between, we added another rhyme to the song "The Ghazi from Pakistan is welcome!"

Hearing these comments I could get some meaning out of the episode. All the same I enquired "But how did you manage to get there?"

"Her cousin lives there. She helped us to join the others."

Surely Morarji Desai would not be enamoured by such a welcome.

The weather these days was quite pleasant. We had arranged meetings and conventions of the National Conference at many places in parks, large street intersections and the main bazars of the town. The large population of boatmen and others living around the Dal Lake had not however been contacted as yet. So we arranged a procession of shikaras and motor boats through the interior waterways of the lake. The lake was situated within the Nigeen constituency of District Srinagar for which Abdul Samad Teli was the N.C. candidate.

A couple of thousand small boats and a dozen motor boats were decorated with red flags and buntings of the N.C with the plough sign in white printed on them. The flags fluttered in the lovely breeze and the entire scenario was deeply reddened by the profusion of the buntings and flags. In my boat I was accompanied by my children. They were also very enthusiastic and were shouting slogans along with the crowds of people gathered for the occasion on the boats. The entire Dal Lake was reverberating with the slogans in Kashmiri which translated as follows: "July the 3rd Plough is honoured".

People, men, women and children came out of the houseboats

and the many hutments on the islands within the lake and cheered lustily to welcome the procession. In places we made speeches and talked at length to the people exhorting them to make the National Conference candidate win with a decisive majority of votes.

We were to have lunch in a house in the lake area. My children were very hungry. It was very late in the afternoon. They said, "It is a strange picnic—all without any food!" At last the procession halted and we got nice food to eat. My children ate from the same large copper plate in the Kashmiri style. I took a separate china plate and ate same food.

On 6th July 1977, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan was removed from power and General Zia-ul-Haq of the Pakistan Army took over the reins of the new government. People in Jammu and Kashmir ignored this development in Pakistan because they have had a nice democratic election only three days earlier and were celebrating the occasion of victory of National Conference in these elections. There was so much jubilation all around that events elsewhere didn't have any impact immediately. Wherever one looked, one could hear the slogan "Long live Sher-i-Kashmir". Results of the election from various constituencies were pouring in from hour to hour and N.C. candidates were winning everywhere. Fire crackers and bouts of spontaneous dancing were everywhere. There were many small processions along the streets in honour of victorious candidates and also general rejoicing.

As I was writing these events of thirteen years ago, there was a news flash about Pakistan again. The democratic government of Pakistan, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, daughter of late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, has been dismissed on 6th August 1990. Fresh elections have been scheduled for October 24. The President of Pakistan Ghulam Ishaq Khan backed by the powerful Army, dismissed the twenty-month-old government, dissolved the National Assembly and ordered fresh elections.

Troops rolled out on the streets of Islamabad and the army once again took control of key complexes including the Prime

Minister's house and secretariat, the national television centre and the radio station. Some members of the administration faced arrest. Ishaq Khan accused the Pakistan People's Party government of Benazir Bhutto of unconstitutional practices, corruption, nepotism, inability to control the deteriorating law and order situation in ethnic trouble-torn Sind, and failure to do justice with other provinces. The President also declared a state of emergency in Pakistan. Ms Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari was arrested only a fortnight before the scheduled elections!

Is it a strange coincidence of the sub-continent's history that every time there is some momentous change going on in Jammu and Kashmir, there are reverberations of equally important nature in Pakistan? In 1977 Sheikh Abdullah was forging ahead with the building of a renewed democratic ethos in the state, whereas Pakistan murdered democracy and ushered in a period of eleven years of military dictatorship and Islamic fundamentalism. It was this kind of ethos in Pakistan that created a situation in Kashmir where youth were armed with sophisticated weapons and were provided military training in Pakistan in order to indulge in acts of terrorism, arson and sabotage. As India had warned, creating such fires in the neighbours backyard could only spread fire in one's own house. That is what happened. Sind became a cauldron of fire, everywhere there were only bullets, murder and disorder. Life became impossible for the citizens. The army had to be called out everywhere in Karachi and Hyderabad. There ensued a tussle between the army and the government.

On 2nd August 1990, Iraq attacked Kuwait in the Persian Gulf and deposed the Emir from his rule. A new regime took over and Iraq virtually grabbed Kuwait. The U.S.A. and its allies moved their forces into Saudi Arabia in order to check-mate the power of Iraq. The situation became tense. In Pakistan came the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto and the emergence of an army-backed rule. This highlighted the role of the Pakistani army in the U.S.-backed armed action in the West Asia region. What repercussions all these events would have on the goings-on in the state would be evident in the months to come. Meanwhile, let me proceed with the recapitulation of events of the past.

During this period, in 1977, I would shuttle between victory processions and Mujahid Manzil. I would announce from the dais the number of seats won by the N.C. candidates. Every announcement I made was greeted by a loud applause by men, women and young people gathered in the main hall and the compound outside. They would go into a frenzy of dancing. G.M. Shah and other party stalwarts were delighted with such success of their efforts.

From Mujahid Manzil I went straight to the residence of Sheikh Abdullah. A large number of people had collected in the lawns and some of the leaders of the party were sitting inside the house. Amongst them were Sheikh Rashid, cousin of Sheikh Sahib, Sheikh Nazir, Sheikh's nephew and Secretary General of the National Conference, Begum Abdullah, Mrs. Khalida Shah, eldest daughter of Sheikh Sahib and wife of G.M. Shah. I shook hands with everybody one by one and congratulated them. At that juncture, whoever I met profusely congratulated me on the success of the party. Everybody was cheerful and showed a profound pride on his face for grand success in the election. I moved on to meet Sheikh Sahib on his sick bed. He was sitting up on the bed with the support of a large pillow. In spite of his illness and weakness there was a look of happiness and satisfaction on his face.

"Congratulations Papa! Hearty Congrats!", I addressed him emotionally and enthusiastically for the first time.

He hugged me. I could see that his hands were trembling. The illness had left him quite weak. Dr Ali Mohd. Jan, a renowned physician and a long time friend and medical attendant of Sheikh Mohd. Abdullah was standing nearby along with Sheikh Nazir. Once again I congratulated everyone on the occasion and left the room.

On 7th July, the National Conference organized a massive rally in the polo ground of Srinagar, not far away from the residence of Sheikh Sahib. Thousands of people participated and were very keen to have a glimpse (*darshan*) of Sheikh Sahib. In spite of restrictions on his movements, ordered by his physicians, Sheikh Sahib did take part in the proceedings for a while.

The polo ground was filled to capacity. The two roads on either side of the ground were filled with people too and all vehicular traffic on the roads had ground to a dead halt.

All the buildings around the park were filled with people looking out from the windows and balconies in such large numbers that it looked as if grapes were hanging from the vine.

Sheikh Sahib was carried to the site atop a bus. Due to severe illness he had become very weak. He needed a lot of help by people to enable him to sit on his chair.

He spoke to the crowd very briefly. He emphasized that all his efforts are directed to ensure honour, eminence, peace and prosperity to the people of Kashmir. He also talked about development and progress of the state in the years to come. People were gratified for his "Darshan" and greeted him with loud applause. Party workers in large numbers came down from towns and villages to N.C. headquarters to convey their felicitations on the occasion. With these developments began yet another period of progress and prosperity for the state.

Chapter 7

March towards Prosperity

ONE of these days I had been to see G.M. Shah at his residence. I also met Mrs Khalida Shah and strolled with them in the garden. The garden was full of people from all walks of life who had come to get their respective requests granted. This is a system peculiar to the entire sub-continent. You can't get a job done expeditiously until you got a "sifarish" (recommendation) from a person in power. Now that N.C. had won and was back in government people had made a beeline to the house of G.M. Shah, one of the most powerful ministers of the Sheikh's Cabinet.

Most of these people who were party workers knew me well. After exchanging greetings, I sat with them on a chair. We talked about party affairs. There was a recently elected M.L.A. and they said to him: "You shall have to get this work done for us. We haven't voted you to become M.L.A. for nothing."

"Come on, give me some respite. I'll help you all I can", replied the M.L.A.

"You aren't doing us a favour? Why do you think we voted for you?"

Others listening to the conversation were also attracted towards the group and wanted to participate in the interesting dialogue. I got up too. I went near them and said "Why are you harassing Mohd. Akbar M.L.A.? He's so embarrassed." I said this with a smile and attracted attention of the workers. One of them said, "Not at all. We have planted a tree, nurtured and watered it. We have protected it from the vagaries of weather and storms. Now it's ripened and ready to bear fruits. We have a right to share the fruits."

"What if he begins to eat the fruits all by himself?" asked another, pointing towards the M.L.A. with a meaningful look.

"In that case we shall not only destroy the fruit but also turn every branch into firewood", replied another worker with light-hearted seriousness.

"Why are you talking of destruction. Let the garden flourish for once." I said with a smile. In the meanwhile G.M. Shah came out on the lawns and shook hands with all, one by one.

Thereafter I went straight to the residence of Sheikh Abdullah which is adjacent to that of Ghulam Mohd. Shah. A large number of people had collected on the lawns there as well. Inside the room I met Begum Abdullah and Begum Zafar Ali who were talking to each other. Begum Zafar Ali is a former member of the Legislative Assembly of the state against the two reserved women's seats. She is a reputed educationist in the field of women's education and a dedicated worker on the social reformation and welfare front. She belongs to a highly cultured and renowned family of Kashmir and is held in high esteem by one and all.

As the two ladies saw me enter they were happy and gave me a warm welcome. They continued with their dialogue.

"I am delighted to tell you, Begum Sahiba that Molly (Farooq Abdullah's wife) not only attends to the work in the hospital, but is also an accomplished housewife", Begum Abdullah was talking about her daughter-in-law with obvious pride.

"Of course, this is natural. A person with good breeding and character cannot be otherwise", added Begum Zafar Ali.

"When is she returning to India?" I enquired.

"Very shortly, she will be here", replied Begum Abdullah.

"Children and family add charm to the home" said Begum Zafar Ali.

"She is rearing the children herself. You can't rely on nurses and baby-sitters", added Begum Abdullah.

"Generally in the west people are used to doing their chores themselves. Irrespective of their status people work with their own hands", added Begum Zafar Ali, emphasizing that Molly is no exception when the entire populace in the west is praiseworthy in this respect.

In the meanwhile some party workers came into the room to

register their presence with Begum Sahiba and also ensure that the loaves and fishes of office about to be distributed may not be given away without their knowing the details.

At this time the post of the Principal, Regional Engineering College, Srinagar was vacant and the position had been advertised. Interviews were to be held on the 22nd August 1977. My husband, Professor O.N.Wakhlu was also one of the candidates for the post among many others. I believed that my husband stood a very good chance to be selected in view of his educational background, experience and academic credentials. When he returned from the interview he was quite happy and satisfied. Sheikh Abdullah had chaired the interviewing committee which included among others D.D Thakur, Education Minister, Mr. Shahani, Jt. Educational Advisor of the Central Govt. and many others.

A week earlier there was a rumour in town about the appointment of a particular candidate to the post. Perhaps it was information floated by his well wishers in the government. Not only this, even the Government of India representative, Mr. Shahani, who paid us a visit a day earlier said, "I shouldn't have come to attend this selection committee meeting. They have already made up their minds and decided the matter."

"Who has made the selection? The interviews have not been held as yet. How come you are talking about final selection having been made?" I asked with annoyance.

"Who gave you this information?" asked Professor Wakhlu from Mr. Shahani with obvious anxiety.

"I was told this by your Registrar. Many others from the college called on me and they repeated this information to me," replied Shahani.

"Let's see who is appointed, who is the ablest to deserve that honour, this shall be decided tomorrow. Nonetheless, you should perform your duty with utmost integrity. After all, you're an important member of the selection committee", I told Shahani.

"When the government wants a certain decision, the committee is only an excuse, a facade." These words of Mr. Shahani left a bitter taste in my mouth. How can it be so, I wondered? Such

injustice! However, I didn't say anything. I continued.

"Whatever you have heard Mr. Shahani, that is without any basis. You don't know Sheikh Sahib. He is well known for his concern for ability." Something within was compelling me to utter these words.

"Yes, if they don't ignore merit, Dr. Wakhlu stands a very good chance", agreed Shahani as he took leave of me.

On 23rd August 1977 there was a good gathering of ministers of the government and well known citizens of Srinagar in the premises of the Vishwabharati College at Rainawari. It was the annual function of this famous women's college well known for its excellence in imparting school and college level education to over 1000 female students from the various localities of Srinagar. Built with dedication by a private educational society and aided by the state government, the Vishwabharati institution made rapid strides in women's education over the last several years from 1956 when it was first established.

As I am writing these events of the past, it pains me immensely to record the fact that during the ongoing holocaust in the valley of Kashmir during the summer of 1990, this excellent institution has been the butt of attacks by those who would like to demolish all vestiges of modern education from the valley. The entire library of the college and the school and the entire complex of buildings, built brick by brick as a labour of love, have been reduced to ashes by arson by the misguided youth of Kashmir. Nothing could be more tragic.

I attended the annual function also. Begum Abdullah, Hakim Habibullah, M.K. Tikku and some other well known personalities were also present on the occasion. It was a delight to watch the cultural programmes presented by the students. Kashmiri females, one could see vividly on this occasion, had come a long way away from the dark days of the feudal era. There were glimpses of dance and music from different parts of India. The audience was watching the programme with rapt attention. Suddenly Begum Abdullah caught a glimpse of me as I was sitting in the corner. She signalled me to come near her, which I did. And she told me, "Heartiest congratulations, Lataji. Your husband has been se-

lected." She held my hand tightly while conveying her warm felicitations.

"Congratulations to you also, Mummy, I can't express to you how happy I am", I replied with obvious delight.

"You can't get away with mere words. You shall celebrate the occasion," Begum Sahiba said.

"Of course, of course. I shall arrange to give you all a nice treat. After all, you have done so much for us." I replied conveying my gratitude for her concern and kindness.

Soon thereafter, Mr. Tikku talked to me and said "Sheikh Sahib was very happy about your husband's performance at the interview with the selection committee. Hearty congratulations to you."

The news spread fast. Whoever met me later congratulated me. I was satisfied that the new government meant to re-establish systems for the progress and development of the people. Moreover, I was convinced that Sheikh Sahib is totally committed to promotion of excellence and appreciation of merit.

A few days later I took along a large cake to the residence of Sheikh Sahib. He along with his wife and other members of the family had gone to the wild-life sanctuary of Dachhigam for rest. Dr. Farooq Abdullah was, however, at home. He was happy to see me. I was somewhat worried though, because I hadn't made a prior appointment for meeting Sheikh Sahib and his family. He wasn't keeping too well, I should have known. He needed complete rest. Dr. Farooq was quick to read my perplexed thoughts. He said, "Come in. Please come inside", saying this he showed me into the dining room of the house. As I sat in a chair I said, "I have brought this cake for Papa, Mummy and all of you. I wonder how I could get it there?"

"I'm going there in a short while anyway. I'll take it along and everybody from home is there. You got the cake well in time", said Farooq Abdullah, while dialling a number he said, "I'll get to Dachhigam right away." As he said so he was beginning a conversation with his mother on phone.

"Mum, guess who has come here?" Then he spoke about me to

his mother and told her that he'll soon join them along with my present.

These were the days of the holy month of Ramzan. Dr Farooq was also fasting. It was nearly 7 o'clock and time to break the fast—"Iftihar".

"I'll break my fast. You'll join me too", said Farooq.

"I am not fasting", I said smiling.

"So what? You can give me company."

"Of course."

Two glasses full of cold milk mixed with black "babri" seeds were brought in. Kashmiris drink this for good health and as a liver tonic. And when Ramazan falls in the hot summer this cold drink does a lot of good. After a day's total fasting, the drink really cools the body. While sipping the drink I observed, "I'm tasting it for the first time. It's a nice drink. Did you observe fasts in England too?" I asked.

"No, I have been keeping this fast after my return. I'm a Muslim, so I keep the fast. My wife is a Christian. She doesn't observe all these customs." Farooq replied in his usual open style. I was enjoying the conversation and I asked:

"Do you have my conflicts arising out of these differences?"

"She goes by what she desires. Why should I force my ways on her. And I follow my own ways. There is no conflict," Farooq said.

From what he said I realized that Farooq was quite liberal and emancipated in his outlook. He was above narrow considerations of caste, religion and orthodoxy.

Our conversation moved on to the topics of the engineering college where my husband had taken over as Principal. Farooq observed, "This college is a den of trouble. It's a source of destructive politics of the whole country. Innumerable problems arise there everyday leading to all kinds of troubles."

"It could be a fallout of the negative politics of Congress(I)?", I said.

"It's Congress(I), It's Jamat-i-Islami, you name it. It's all there. Your husband has a tough assignment. It's a challenge, I think", added Dr. Farooq.

In the meanwhile a couple of friends of Dr Farooq dropped in. I took leave of them and returned home.

On the way home, I stopped at a shop to buy few things. I met Abdul Ghani Lone, former Education Minister of the state in the cabinet of G.M. Sadiq. We exchanged greetings and seeing him, I remembered the following episode: When the National Conference was revived in 1975, A.G. Lone, along with some others, had left the Congress(I) and joined the party. He had been a member of long standing in the Indian National Congress and the Congress(I). When Sheikh Sahib revived the N.C. many Congress(I) politicians undoubtedly realized that their political future was safe only by merging with the National Conference. Consequently, a large number of workers and party veterans broke away from the Congress(I) and joined the N.C. fold. Prominent leaders who took this momentous decision included A.G. Lone, G.N. Sogami, Mohd. Ashraf Khan, Mohd. Shafi Uri, Mian Bashir Ahmed, Sonaulah Dar, and Malik Mohi-ud-din and others.

Sometime later, at a special meeting of N.C. at Mujahid Manzil these newcomers to the party fold were welcomed and introduced to the rank and file of the party by Sheikh Abdullah himself.

Members of the N.C. and the workers no doubt formally welcomed these people but inside their hearts they were envious and disturbed over this development. In fact some of the party workers clearly spelt out their anxiety:

"Till this date we have hated their guts. Now they have joined our ranks as our well-wishers", they said.

"They have no scruples. Like honeybees they run only after honey. Now that we have our government they are greedy", said some others.

"They're like dogs going after bones. Can't trust them", others muttered in anger.

"Come on! This is the decision of our leader. He has always told us to forgive our enemies and in any case, they are our own kin."

"They are the proverbial prodigal sons returned back to the fold", clarified another.

While the workers were thus commenting on the new situation in the main hall, some others met in the adjoining room. This room was frequently used by G.M. Shah to meet people individually or in small groups. The room was filled to capacity on this day. A.G. Lone and some others were talking to G.M. Shah. As I entered the room, some people made way for me and I squeezed myself into a low seat.

A G. Lone was talking to G.M. Shah about the composition of the Executive Committees at the district level. He was insisting on the inclusion of his own nominees for key positions in these committees.

"Now that we have joined the N.C. our workers must feel that their prestige is as high as before", said A.G. Lone while adding further, "I am not bothered about your office bearers, I have no quarrel with them. I'm thinking of my workers. They haven't joined the N.C. for nothing."

"We can adjust five of your partymen, no more!", responded G.M. Shah rather angrily. He hadn't, however, lost his cool yet.

"At least fourteen members of my group should be adjusted in the committees as office bearers. On that assurance alone have they changed their loyalties, Otherwise they need not be here."

A.G.Lone emphasized his argument in an angry and loud tone. He was already getting into a temper.

"We haven't made any kind of pact in the first place. You came to our fold of your own sweet will. You ought to have thought this before you made up your mind. We shall not annihilate our dedicated workers who have made sacrifices in the past", Shah was angrily shouting back at Lone. The atmosphere was tense.

"Are you the only ones who have made sacrifices. We too have the support of the people. They aren't animals," retorted Lone with his face red with anger. Shah was equally furious and shouting, "Get out! We don't need vultures like you in the party. We know your pretensions to leadership. You're swindlers."

Exchange of such hot words almost led to fisticuffs. But for

the intervention of Hissam-ud-din Bandey and others, the situation would have taken a bad turn. A.G. Lone realized that there was no point in pursuing the matter any further. He quietly left the room.

All these events and the behaviour of the leaders made me very sad. Mere trifles could bring the matters to such a pass. I wondered what kind of leadership would such people provide to others who looked up to them? How can those who do not discipline themselves or control their actions show the correct way to others? These thoughts were bothering me quite a lot.

As I came out to proceed home, I found A.G. Lone in the corridor.

"Are you going home?" he asked me.

"Yes, of course", I replied. He offered me a lift in his car, as he lived next door to my house. I sat in his car as he drove. On the way he poured out all his venom against Shah and made critical remarks. I listened silently. Nor did I consider it proper to speak out my mind on the subject. As he concluded his diatribe, he told me, "I'm not going to be in this party. It's not my cup of tea". Over the next few months many of those, who had joined the newly formed National Conference, left its fold after this episode. Among those who remained behind were Mohd Shafi, Ashraf Khan and Sonaullah. Eventually A.G. Lone became a loner and took to a very different line of political activity.

After her defeat in the national elections for Parliament, Indira Gandhi paid a private visit to Srinagar. Miss Mahmooda Ali Shaw who was personal Secretary to Mrs. Gandhi for many years accompanied her to Srinagar. Sheikh Abdullah ordered that she be treated as a State guest by his government. In spite of many differences at the political level, Sheikh Sahib and Indira Gandhi maintained warm and cordial relations. Indiraji looked quite frail. Later on 23rd September, she was invited to lunch at the Vishwabharati Women's College before her visit to the famous shrine of Kheerbhavani near village Tullamullah situated at about fifteen kilometres from Srinagar. Respecting local sentiments she was served a typically vegetarian Kashmiri lunch. The state govern-

ment had organized this lunch at the school. While Mehmoodaji accompanied Indiraji, I was directed by Sheikh Sahib to represent him and the National Conference on this occasion.

Mrs. Gandhi arrived at the school punctually. She was given a warm welcome by all present. As I garlanded her with the loveliest autumn flowers of Kashmir, there were loud slogans of "Indira Gandhi Zindabad" by the crowd of people who had collected. Among them were many women of the Rainawari area where the college complex is situated. A large number of Kashmiri Pandit women were particularly visible in the crowd. Although students were on a holiday, quite a good number of them had turned up to welcome Indira Gandhi.

She met the girls and women warmly. She embraced them and talked to them freely. The women were praying with folded hands, for her return to power and gave her their lavish blessings in typical Kashmiri style in rhyming short verses.

After formal speeches and a colourful programme of cultural and musical items in the open lawns, Indira Gandhi was taken upstairs to the main hall where I, along with Mehmoodaji and Mrs. Pratibha, joined her for the lunch. The lunch was served Indian style and we all sat down to eat. The food was served in stainless steel "Thalis" placed on spotless white cloth "dastarkhan" already spread in front of the guests.

I was seated next to Indiraji and on her other side sat Mehmoodaji. As each item of the menu was being served, Mrs. Gandhi noticed the variety of the delicacies and said "This preparation 'Nadroo Yakhni' is nice. We make Yakhni often at home."

"You don't get 'Nadroo' at Delhi? Perhaps you can't make this one?" I enquired.

"We make 'Yakhni' of loki. Damaloo and Sagh are also favourite dishes", replied Indiraji.

"Of course, Nadroo is now also available in Delhi. We got it a couple of times", added Mehmoodaji.

"I had cultivated Sagh in my kitchen garden. Got the seed from here", said Indiraji.

"It must have grown well. Seeds sprout profusely in new soil", Mehmoodaji added.

"Has your residence been constructed?" I enquired from Indiraji.

"Oh! that takes time. But the garden is laid out and came up well", she replied.

While we were talking Prem Nath Thussu, Secretary of Vishwabharati came in. He was raising his both hands in a gesture of prayerful blessings and felicitating Mrs. Gandhi for success in future

"May God bring you back on the throne. You were a tower of strength for us. You are Mother Goddess and the 'Asuras' have bothered you a lot", Thussu said in Kashmiri which Indiraji did not understand. It was my pleasant duty to translate these words to her. She was quite pleased to hear those words of praise about her and asked me, "Who is this gentleman?"

"He's Prem Nath Thussu. He's the secretary of the Managing Committee of this school", I replied.

The next day Sheikh Sahib had invited Indiraji for a dinner at the state banquet hall for an official welcome. All the senior government officials, besides a gathering of well known citizens were present on the occasion. The Cabinet Ministers and workers of the National Conference were also invited. Outside the hall, in the beautiful wide lawns, a programme of dance, cultural items and music was arranged. Under beautiful awnings in front of the pandal the honoured guests were seated. In the front row sat Indiraji, Sheikh Sahib and members of his family. I sat in the second row just behind Indiraji. During the programme Sheikh Abdullah was explaining to Indira Gandhi the meaning of the Kashmiri songs and ghazals beings sung in the programme. The whole area had been illuminated with tiny colourful electric bulbs hanging from the chinar trees and the buildings. It was a beautiful evening.

The programme was going on and I saw Sheikh Sahib signal one of his aides. He asked for a shawl immediately. As it was brought forth in a short while, Sheikh Sahib stood up and placed the shawl over the shoulders of Indiraji and said, "It's getting rather chilly. You have a cold?"

It's not really the cold weather. Usually I get allergic to

flower scents. Marigolds are particularly troublesome”, replied Indiraji. There was silence again and everyone got absorbed in listening to the lovely music.

Later we went inside the hall for dinner. Soup was served hot, and all of us were moving around meeting each other. After briefly talking to my party colleagues I went over straight to Indiraji who was talking to a few bureaucrats standing around her. Begum Abdullah was also nearby sharing the conversation. As usually happens on such occasions, in a short while, I found myself standing alone with Mrs. Gandhi. Her plate was empty. With some surprise, I asked:

“Your plate is almost empty? Shall I bring you some food please?”

“No thank you. That’s all I will have”, she replied.

“I wonder how you can make do with so little. You work so hard and need energy to sustain you”, I said with obvious astonishment and concern.

“It’s enough for my needs”, she replied.

Thereafter Indiraji questioned me on the kind of work I was doing in the National Conference. I gave her an idea of the work being done by the party at the grassroots level. She was about to say something in response. However, saying “Congress . . .” she kept quiet as more people came around to meet her and our conversation ended abruptly. I couldn’t make out what it was she wanted to convey.

My elder brother’s daughter was to get married in the month of October. There was also the celebration of Yagopavit of my nephews on this occasion. I had invited a few of my party colleagues for dinner on one of these days. Dharamvir Singh Oberoi was President of the Srinagar Municipal Council those days. He came for the dinner with his wife. The dinner was hosted in one of the halls in the old style traditional mansion of the Dhar family, my ancestral abode. This is situated in Nawakadal locality of Srinagar, in the heart of the so called downtown area of the city. Dr. Farooq Abdullah and his wife also were invited to the dinner and both of them attended. As Dr. Farooq entered the hall he

looked around at the walls and the ceiling and observed,

"It's an old mansion. Could you tell me how old it is?"

"Must be about three hundred years old, I believe. Repairs must have been done from time to time. That's why it still looks nice", I replied.

Observing the intricate wood work of the columns and the ceiling, Farooq remarked "Nowadays such minute workmanship will take ages to accomplish. Besides it's backbreaking work. It doesn't call for mere workmanship, there is need for lot of dedication too."

"Such buildings are museum pieces now. They appear archival curiosities before the cement concrete homes of today", observed Dharamvir Oberoi during the conversation. As they sat and talked, I excused myself and stood up to receive D.D.Thakur, minister in Sheikh Abdullah's cabinet as he was about to enter the hall. He came alone. The hall was by now full of guests seated on the floor. I took Thakur Sahib to one side of the hall and made him sit by the side of D.N. Kaul retired Inspector General of Police and other well known personalities of the town. Custom and courtesy demanded that the people in the hall should give Thakur due respect for his being a minister. This didn't happen.

It is a peculiar shortcoming of Kashmiri pandits that they do not easily concede superior status to others both within their narrow community as well as their social contacts. This negative attitude in a changing dynamic world has given rise to animus against them from time to time.

On this occasion I was quite hurt and was ashamed of the behaviour of my community. Thakur Sahib did not stay long. He excused himself and left the hall without joining the feast.

Dharamvir Singh Oberoi had become well known as the Fountain President because as chairman of the Municipal Council he got a number of good fountains constructed in various parts of the city. Kashmiris have a tradition of nicknaming people and the practice continues. Surnames arise from innumerable nick-names, nature of work and the kind of trade one deals with. If someone kept pigeons as pets he became Mr. Kotru (Mr. Pigeon). Surnames arising from cats (Braroo), cocks (Kokroo), cups (Pyala),

fox (Shal) etc., are quite common.

One day there was a large meeting at Mujahid Manzil. A good gathering of people and party workers were present. The main hall was filled to capacity. Also there were crowds in the lanes. People were listening to the speech of Sheikh Abdullah. The main subject of his lecture was about the abolishing of subsidy on food rations issued to the people. The majority of workers were not in favour of withdrawing the food subsidy, because the people were paying less for rations which could cost a lot more otherwise.

The question of withdrawal of food subsidy provided a good political weapon to the other political parties including Congress(I), Jamat-i-Islami, and the Awami Action Committee. The leaders of these parties unleashed a spate of anti-Sheikh speeches in different places.

"The National Conference is hell bent on strangling poor people. They were claiming to be a pro-poor party and now they have come out in their true colours. Those who paid Rs 50 for their monthly food rations shall have to pay Rs 150 now. This is a cruel blow to their livelihood."

Such propaganda was carried out in the streets, shops, hotels, restaurants and coffee houses. And the workers of the N.C. were quite worried. In spite of their pleas Sheikh Abdullah didn't change his stance. He made it clear in his speech to the people and said, "People have got used to a subsidy culture. It is a disease. Such subsidy on food is not given to people in any other state. Why should we take it? We can utilize the amount given in subsidy for development works. We do not accept doles, we should not do so now, but we should endeavour to stand on our own feet."

There were many voices in the crowd which protested to Sheikh's utterances. "People would get very angry with the government of the N.C. for withdrawing subsidy suddenly. They will no longer stand by us. Our enemies will benefit." Many such voices rose from the crowds and could be heard over the din and noise. Many workers wanted their protest to be heeded by their leaders.

All this noise produced an adverse reaction in Sheikh Abdul-

lah's mood. He was visibly angry and agitated. His face became red with rage and the dormant lion in him roared again: "Whom are you talking about? Before we came back to power who were the people with us? We had been reduced to just the five of us. These included Beg Sahib and Begum Abdullah among others. Am I right? Why have you become silent? Isn't it a fact that you would turn away sheepishly when you would encounter us?"

As Sheikh Sahib said this, the din of the crowd turned into an eerie silence and the listeners had put down their heads in shame.

Sheikh Sahib looked at the people with empathy and coughed a little in order to change his tone. In a milder and loving voice, more like that of a school headmaster addressing his beloved students, he continued with his speech. "Yes people will no doubt dislike this to begin with. But when they appreciate why we are doing it then they will cooperate with us. We want our state move towards progress and development. This will be possible only when we give up these crutches of subsidy. You are the eyes, ears and arms of your party. It's your duty to go and explain these issues to the people so that they have no doubts or misgivings in their minds." He ended his speech on this milder note and as he concluded, the crowds raised tumultuous slogans of "Long Live Sher-i-Kashmir" which reverberated in the hall and the lawns outside. It was a memorable sight. Suddenly all the people, the whole of Kashmir, seemed to be moving again enthusiastically towards progress. There was a renewed burst of energy visible and no obstacles would be tolerated.

Usually after his public speech Sheikh Sahib would retire to a side room near the hall. He would offer his "Namaz" (prayers) here, rest, or sometimes call a few of his associates to discuss political matters informally. Often it was a delight to see the humorous aspect of the Sheikh's personality during those private conversations. There was a large table and about a dozen chairs in this room for colleagues to sit around.

One of these days Sheikh Sahib was in this room talking to political workers who had come from far off districts. Some of the office bearers of the Srinagar District including myself were also in the room. I was listening intently to what was being talked

about on the political goings on. Shortly Dharamvir Singh Oberoi also dropped in. Seeing him Sheikh Sahib smiled and said, "How do you do, Mr. Fountain Singh? What is the progress with your fountains?" Hearing this, all of us had a hearty laugh. Dharamvir Singh Oberoi also joined us in the loud laughter and absolutely unruffled, he replied:

"Now people at home also address me as Fountain Singh. Even my children believe that this is perhaps my real name!"

Appreciating Oberoi's sense of humour we all laughed, and the atmosphere was quite relaxed.

"Who invented this joke?" asked Sheikh Sahib somewhat innocently.

"It was the cartoon in the *Srinagar Times Daily*", said some people in the audience.

"Kashmiris get a great deal of pleasure in inventing nick-names. They fall back on anything to create new names, even birds, animals and fruits," Sheikh Sahib observed in a jocular mood.

"Indeed people have forgotten their original names", observed Mohi-ud-din Shawl.

"And Hindus and Muslims have carried on with identical nick-names. They have maintained their kinship even in this respect", said another colleague.

"Haven't you heard that interesting joke? That anecdote about Mr. Teng?" asked Sheikh Sahib, addressing this question to me. He paused for a while and then said "Why don't you relate that anecdote? Let them all hear it."

"There grew a large mulberry tree in somebody's house. The family was not known by its family name any longer. Everybody called the family by the surname "Tulu" (mulberry). Annoyed, the members of the family decided to get rid of the tree and thereby the nick-name as well. The tree was cut. The thick stem at the base however remained intact within the soil. Then the family began to be named "Mundu" (the stem). The family showed some guts. They didn't cherish the new name. So the stem was uprooted from the soil. As it happened, this operation left behind a small ditch in the ground. Before the family could do anything about it

they began to be addressed as “Khoda” (the pits). Exasperated by the unrelenting friends and neighbours the family decided to go in for the last solution. They filled the pit in order to level the ground and remove all traces of the tree. In the process the ground in that spot became a wee bit raised. The neighbours who enjoy the nick-naming game observed the small mound of clay and called the family by the name “Teng” (mound). Thereafter, they did not bother to try to change that name again!”

As I finished narration of the anecdote everybody laughed and Sheikh Sahib remarked, “And the names which were invented in between? What happened to these? Are they still used?”

“Yes, of course. Many families carry these names even now”, said Hissam-ud-din Bandey.

Thereafter everyone discussed some routine matters with Sheikh Sahib and bring to his notice as Chief Minister of the state some administrative problems that needed immediate decisions. I also made a request to him.

“Mrs. J.N. Madan, the widow of a brilliant Civil Engineer of the state Govt. who died very young while in the prime of his career, owned a house. She had given it out on rent to a tenant for a number of years. As if her earlier tragedy was not enough, two of her young sons died very suddenly. She now wanted to use the house for her own residence. The tenant is refusing to vacate the house even after she made repeated entreaties to him. She is in tragic circumstances and needs the house badly”, I told Sheikh Sahib.

“The tenant has a legal right to live there”, Sheikh Sahib said.

“But now her personal need is paramount. And at this hour of their tragedy if you cannot help her, who else can? Where else will she go and beg for support?” I made an earnest appeal to Sheikh Sahib.

“How long has the tenant been residing in the house?”, asked Sheikh Sahib with a frown on his forehead, a sure indication that he had empathy for the appellant’s plight.

“For many years. And he hasn’t even paid rent fully”, I replied. I did not really have all the details. But I did submit the broad facts which appealed to Sheikh’s keen sense of justice. He

called his Personal Secretary and issued instructions to him for taking up the matter immediately. Within a few days I learnt that the tenant was asked by the Divisional Commissioner's office to vacate the widow's house which he did promptly.

In the month of April it was usual for a senior minister of the Cabinet to pay a visit to Srinagar, the winter capital. This was a prelude to the transfer of the government offices from Jammu to Srinagar in the first week of May each year. This time it was G.M. Shah who came to Srinagar. He called a meeting of party workers of the N.C. at Mujahid Manzil. There was a packed crowd of workers in the hall as usual.

Many workers delivered speeches and addressed the audience highlighting some of the problems faced by the people in the winter. There had been some shortages of food and other essential commodities. G.M. Shah was Minister for Food and Supplies. The workers did not express their grievances openly and freely on this count because they knew G.M. Shah's mercurial temper.

After some of them spoke it was my turn to address the audience. I held the mike as I stood up and spoke. I talked about the travails of winter in the valley and referred to the shortage of electric power and that of charcoal for fire-pots for keeping warm.

And I mentioned that even if the charcoal was available at the supply depots, it was quite wet and unusable. Rice was not available at the ration shops in time every month. The quality of rice was poor. Often it was not cleaned but was full of minute gritty stones.

I referred to the blatant corruption of the employees in the Food and Supply Department and the harassment to the people caused by them. As I spoke the workers and other people in the audience cheered my speech loudly. My words got lost in the sound and echo of the cheers. I took a little pause and then spoke again, "Shah Sahib, you were in Jammu all these months. It would have been appropriate if once in a while every minister of the government had paid a visit to the valley during the winter. Perhaps, the people would not then have been put to so much inconvenience. When women have to go to the ration depots on

the river banks in biting cold of winter, walking over smooth frozen snow and ice, they are miserable. And their condition is worse, when after waiting for hours in the cold, they return home empty handed because the deliveries of supply did not come. I do not have to describe more details here, but I do feel a wrench in my heart on seeing the plight of people in this condition."

I talked about many other problems facing the people. When I ended my speech, the cheers seemed to convey to me the feelings of the people, namely:

"What she has said represents our own feelings and thoughts. Someone is lightening our burden. She is speaking the truth without any hesitation."

My speech made an adverse impression on my senior party colleagues including G.M. Shah who in particular was quite piqued by my utterances. He was enraged and spoke against me as he addressed the audience, "It is easy to incite people like she has done. She must not have gone to the ration depot ever herself. And yet she chose to bring up these issues. We have seen such rabble rousers aplenty in the past. What does Lata (referring to me) think of herself? We are not enjoying at Jammu, we are not celebrating. Running the government is not child's play. We do know when people experienced difficulties in the valley." G.M. Shah lost his temper. I kept quiet and watched the response of the workers. It seemed to me that the people generally were full of praise for me. Looking at them, I realized that the arrows that I had shot inadvertently had indeed hit the bull's eye. This was conveyed to me by the workers at the end of the meeting.

Some days later one of my acquaintances K.N. Kachroo called on me about some personal matters. Finally he came to the main topic of his conversation for which he had paid this unscheduled visit. He began to discuss local politics with which he kept in touch through his contact with Ghulam Nabi Kochak. Kachroo was working for him in Anantnag. Ghulam Nabi Kochak was now a minister in the Cabinet of Sheikh Abdullah. He had sent Kachroo to convey to me that I should give up raising people's problems and inciting them on political issues. Further, I was told that if I followed these instructions, Shah and Kochak would

propose and strongly back my nomination to the membership of the Legislative Council in the near future. I heard Kachroo Sahib quietly. However, as he took leave to go I told him, "Whatever I said or did was a part of my duty. I had no intention of maligning anyone. I have no animus against anybody."

I reflected over the situation and wondered what utterances of mine had annoyed these people and why.

Political parties depend for financial support on membership fees and people's donation. National Conference was no exception. I had interesting experience of such work in the party. There was a drive for enrolling of members and all the fees recovered by party workers were to be deposited in the central office. Donors of substantial amounts would be offered life membership of the party. Printed receipt books for the purpose were issued to office bearers and senior workers and party funds had started getting accumulated. For the Srinagar District, I was also given the task of raising funds and enrolling members. Bundles of receipt books were issued to me for the purpose.

I set about my work in right earnest, and went about collecting funds in the bazars of Srinagar in Maisuma, Lal Chowk, and other places. During this period I realized how much love and respect people had for Sheikh Abdullah. There was a large number of people who paid five hundred rupees instead of the one hundred requested for. I was shown lot of respect, was always treated with courtesy, the shop owners often insisting that I share a cup of tea with them. They offered donations gladly and would also whisper some words of advice into my ears.

"Please don't approach the owner of that shop", someone would say pointing towards a neighbouring establishment.

"But why?" I asked.

"He is even allergic to Sheikh Sahib's name. He is a die-hard Jamat-i-islami follower," the shopowner clarified.

"Well, I am duty bound to treat all with the same respect. I shouldn't differentiate between people. After all, they too belong here. Maybe they won't pay more, but some amount they shall perhaps pay in any case", I said.

This gesture of mine was appreciated by all and most of the

time I would be seen off by the shopowners happily showering their blessings on me.

Shopkeepers who were committed to some other political parties had a way of their own to put me off and refuse donations. Said one of them, "We are tired of dishing out money from time to time. We had prayed to God for an efficient and honest government system. What did we get? Is there less corruption now? Life is impossible without bribery today. Every now and then we have to bribe many employees of the government. We have to keep the police pleased; the employees of electric department must receive regular custom; municipal employees ask for their own share of regular cuts. And on top of it, there is no dearth of political parties and other socio-political outfits whom we have to keep in good humour. If we curtail funds from any one party today, tomorrow their workers will come to raise a hue and cry. And since your party is now in power, we can't afford to say 'No' to you ?"

"If you're not inclined to pay please don't bother", I would say politely with a smile trying to hide my own remorse.

"Were it someone else, I wouldn't pay a dime. But I won't let you go empty handed. You are our own daughter", was the typical refrain of other shopkeepers' response to my request for donations. Kashmiris are quite clever and diplomatic in conversation and can easily retrieve from an unpleasant situation and change it for the better. Utterance of one good word or a thoughtful sentence helps to mitigate bitter feelings.

The people of Kashmir also have a peculiar temperament. Their moods change quickly. They are readily angered but their temper cools down ever so quickly. In anger they go raving mad. This reminds me about an incident which involved my housemaid (Mehri).

Mehri looked after my children very well. Whenever I was out on my work she would ably carry out the household chores. And if for any reason she could not be around, our household would get out of gear. Children and adults would lovingly call her Mehr Ded (Mehr the great mother). One day she came running to my home with her clothes soiled with blood. I was distressed to see

her in that condition. Before I could ask her anything she fell on my feet and held on to my legs.

"Bhabi, my husband and son have been taken to the police station. Please help me to get them back", she cried.

"Oh dear! You are bleeding. Get up. How did it all happen?" I was terribly worried.

"My husband and his brother had a quarrel today. We had opened a new window of our house overlooking their compound", she narrated while crying and pleading for help.

While she was narrating her woes I quickly picked up some cotton-wool and spirit and asked her, "To whom does the compound belong?", I cleaned and dressed her wound.

"The compound belongs to both the brothers. It's common property. His sons are downright rowdies. They beat us. My husband hit them with the hammer he carried in his hand. They retaliated and hit my head with stones", said Mehri while she kept on crying and wailing.

"It's a terrible thing. Tell me, is your brother-in-law alive? Why did your husband have to do it? My God! you are so aggressive."

I was filled with remorse and sadness over the family's condition.

"Bhabi, please get my son and husband released from police custody. If you don't, that'll be my end," she insisted. She didn't let me do anything, and was begging me to accompany her to the police station.

I seated Mehri in my car and drove her to the nearby hospital for dressing her wounds and get her first-aid. Then I took her to the police station. There we were told that her brother-in-law has had seven stitches on his head. I talked to the station house officer. He recorded the report and various statements of the parties and on my assurances, Mehri's husband and son were allowed to go home. Mehri was delighted and expressed her gratitude to me.

Within ten days after this incident, Mehri's husband and his brother called on me at my home. These were the people who had

quarrelled so violently earlier and one had hit the other's head. Mehri accompanied them and she had an application in her hand. As she entered, she said to me, "Bhabi, Gulla's son is unemployed. You have got clout in the government. Please give a recommendation to him for appointment as a Guard in the Department of Forest. That's why we have come to see you."

Gulla (Ghulam Mohd.) is Mehri's brother-in-law. I was wonder struck to see the total reversal of the earlier mood. Then they were sworn enemies of each other, and now such compassion!

"Gulla is an innocent person. He was instigated by his wife's utterances which prompted him to fight with his elder brother. That witch is making them fight and get estranged. She is off somewhere today. That's how we got him here to seek help", Mehri explained.

"We are extremely poor people. His young grown-up son is sitting idle at home. It's so bad. Had he not been at home that day, all that beating up and head bashing wouldn't have occurred. He ventilates his misery and frustration through these brawls. He's become very irritable", said Mehri's brother-in-law in defence of his son's misbehaviour on the earlier occasion. I listened to them with concern and attention and said, "I'll do my best to help him get a job. Rest is in God's hands."

As they left. I was quite moved to see the brothers with their hands on each other's shoulders, expressing their mutual love. I was convinced in my belief that basically Kashmiris are good-natured people who are momentarily dislodged from their innocent ways by adversities and other difficulties. Otherwise, peace and love are part and parcel of their total being. Their traits of aggressiveness, selfishness, and ignorance are superficial layers. These peculiar traits have been acquired by the people over the centuries, living under tyranny and repression, as a means of survival against odds. Unfortunately, these traits of character have over the years become permanent part of their personality.

It was the occasion of the marriage of G.M. Shah's son. I was invited for the feast at lunch time. The lunch was offered under a

huge awning erected in the lawns of his home. It was rather pleasant in this month of June, and a large gathering of VIPs of the state including ministers, officers, business owners and contractors were present at the feast. Exquisite Kashmiri and Persian carpets were spread on the floor and the enclosure was decorated with beautiful hand embroidered tapestries and crewel work decorations on metres of heavy curtain cloths. There were scores of liveried waiters attending chores besides a large number of employees and officers who were lending a helping hand overseeing one arrangement or the other. Crockery and furniture was procured in abundance to ensure a gala feast for the honoured guests. The entire lot of the state's gentry were visible at one place.

Khalida Shah, wife of G.M. Shah and eldest daughter of Sheikh Abdullah, was beautifully attired for the occasion and looked quite pretty.

All the ladies assembled for the feast had come out in their best attire, gorgeously dressed in lustrous silks and wearing loads of elegant, shining jewellery. Everyone seemed to have got out her best in order to show off to each other and indulge in silent one-upwomanship. Many wore their diamonds, rubies, turquoise, and pearls as part of their jewellery.

What I noticed in particular was the fact that along with the acquisition of wealth, people had begun to cultivate a finer taste and an aesthetic sense. One could appreciate that here was an elitist gathering of the richer upper classes of the state. The scenario was by any standards like the best of this world. It was evident that the class of the nouveau rich had not only grown substantially over the years but that riches had also acquired a distinctive higher place in the prevailing value system of the society.

Begum Abdullah was seated near the bride. The guests would come and offer their gifts to the bride. It is customary to give cash gifts called "Gulimuith" in an envelope. A bridesmaid sitting with the bride was writing the names of those who gave presents and the amount given. Begum Sahiba was handling the cash and

carefully putting it away in the bride's purse.

I was sitting on one side of the enclosure. With me were seated Begum Zafar Ali and Mrs. Mohd. Abdullah as also Miss Tahira Shahmiri, Director of Women's Education in the government of Jammu and Kashmir. As usual we began with some small talk. Mrs. Abdullah was describing to me people seated farther away whom I didn't know. She said, pointing to a lady sitting in a corner, "That lady's husband is a millionaire. He is a contractor dealing in crores of rupees."

"Of course, I can guess that. It is obvious from her appearance." I told Mrs. Abdullah whom I knew for many years as our good neighbour.

"Their children have a number of firms and they are expanding their enterprises even now. Their trade is flourishing", she was explaining details to me.

I came to know a lot more about some of the people present there. Nearby two ladies were talking and I overheard them, "He has recently been promoted as a big officer of the Government. He is some relation of theirs."

"Yeah! nowadays only money or kinship are the current coin". As they whispered, one of the ladies caught my eye and signalled the other one to keep quiet.

In the meanwhile Khalida Shah came around and spoke to us. Miss Shahmiri handed over a small packet to Khalidaji as a present for the bride.

I took leave to go and was moving towards my car. I met a senior government engineer and exchanged greetings. He was one of those people who had earned a lot notoriety as a corrupt engineer. Everyone had believed that he would be the first whose services would be terminated by the new regime. In fact, way back in 1976, in one of the open meetings of party workers at Mujahid Manzil his name had figured with some others in a list of those who ought to be sacked by the government for their lack of integrity. Indeed, the name of this particular gentleman was mentioned repeatedly in that meeting. Responding these suggestions then, Shah Sahib had said:

"We know that he is corrupt. But we have got to get works

executed. How shall we readily get good and experienced persons for such jobs? This gentleman is quite intelligent and efficient in his job."

Listening to this response of the concerned minister himself the audience were silenced. As Shah Sahib moved out of the hall into his retiring room next door for offering his mid-day "Namaz", members of the party whispered amongst themselves.

"He must have received his share of the loot. That's why he's talking a different language today."

The change in stance was evident very soon thereafter because people observed that all the important projects were placed under the charge of the same engineer for execution.

In the Municipal elections Ali Mohd. Sagar was elected as a Councillor. One day he attended the meeting of the District Executive Committee of the N.C. with me. At the end of the meeting we were talking informally to each other and the question of languages came up. He observed:

"Urdu rightly deserves to be spoken, written, and understood only by the Muslims. Indeed, Urdu is the language of Muslims alone." He uttered these words with such vehemence as if to emphasize the infallibility of his opinion.

I was amazed at what he said and joined issues with him.

"I am hearing such a statement for the first time. Didn't know that languages too have their religion! And who has told you all this? Is it written in some treatise?" I said with obvious sarcasm. Sagar didn't obviously relish my words and continued telling me more about perceptions on the subject.

"Why? Where is the need to read about this in the books? It's a well known and accepted fact", he said, raising his voice considerably in an attempt to coerce me to accept his argument.

"Look, Mr. Sagar, you're an educated person. It doesn't behove you to speak in such a vein. It hardly matters if you speak, thus, here in private, but please for God's sake, don't utter such words in public. Everybody will laugh at what you are saying", I told Sagar in a tone of an elder's advice to a younger person. But my words didn't produce the desired impact. Instead Ali Mohd. became belligerent and shouted aloud.

“What would you make me understand? My views wouldn’t change by what you say. We shall establish only the Islamic language and Islamic civilization here.” Sagar lost his temper and could no longer keep his cool. However, others present nearby intervened and tried to make him see reason. I remained peaceful but was immensely upset seeing the trend of thoughts and beliefs of the young man, a member of the National Conference Party.

Here I am reminded of a related incident which took place shortly before the Municipal Elections. It was a time when the names of candidates were being discussed within the National Conference circles. On one occasion Sheikh Abdullah summoned me to his retiring room at Mujahid Manzil where two young ladies were already talking to him. As I entered the room he pointed towards the ladies and said to me, “These two ladies are well educated. Both of them are Law graduates. We would like to nominate them alongwith you as N.C. candidates for the Municipal election. After all, there must be good representation for women in these bodies. What is your opinion in this matter?” Sheikh Sahib informed and questioned me in one go. I could see distinct pride writ large on Sheikh Sahib’s face over the fact that women in Kashmir were now educated and capable of taking on new responsibilities.

I was not happy though, for his having bracketed me with these novices. I replied, “Of course, you may please nominate them. . .” I had hardly finished my sentence when Sheikh Sahib intervened suddenly and said,

“Why the two of them? Why not you?” His mood had suddenly changed, and as ever it was obvious because of the tight closure of his lips and the lines that appeared on his broad forehead right in the middle between his two eyebrows. In a bid to change his mood, I diverted his attention and replied:

“If you so desire, who am I to say ‘no’ to you. I was only wondering if it would be alright for three women to be nominated?” He relaxed and I could see the smile coming back to his face. He believed me and accepted my statement.

Actually the situation was evolving differently, as was revealed to me by Sheikh Rashid, another party veteran and nephew

of Sheikh Abdullah. He said, "Khemlataji, you and I are being nominated as candidates for the Municipal Council election. You should refuse this mandate." Not fathoming the implication of his statement at that time, I had asked him, "Why? Why do you advise me thus? Is there any special significance to this?"

"Do we deserve only this? Mere leadership of the Municipal workers? They assign the better positions to themselves and the rest is for us." This conversation was very much at the back of my mind, when sometime later the matter had come up inadvertently between me and Sheikh Abdullah in a different context.

The question of filling eight vacancies to the Legislative Council (the upper house of the J & K Legislative Assembly) came up for decision at this time. It was time now to fill in the necessary papers by the prospective candidates.

There was evidence of differences of opinion within the senior leadership of the party. Beg Sahib and Sheikh Sahib were perceived within the rank and file of the party as leaders of two groups which had however, not as yet fallen apart. This resulted in lot of discussion over the nomination of party candidates for the eight vacant seats of the Legislative Council. Each group was putting its weight behind the candidates of their choice. In the end, however, a broad consensus and compromise seemed to have been achieved. One of the candidates for the vacant seat was the son-in-law of Beg Sahib. The patch-up between the groups did not last long and the leg pulling of each other was on the increase from within and outside.

I believe that all these goings on were a part of the effort by various aspirants to usurp the leadership of the party after Sheikh Abdullah. This would ensure their primacy of power and privilege within the party and in government.

Beg Sahib had fought side by side with Sheikh Abdullah for over forty five years and he had been the single most devoted person who shared the ups and downs of the political movements with him, besides being his personal friend. Whenever Sheikh Sahib took a major stride and gave a new lead, Beg Sahib was the first to run in the vanguard under Sheikh's leadership.

On the other hand, G.M. Shah had also good credentials for

claiming the leadership role of the party. In his hey days he had given up a prestigious career in the government for plunging into the nettle infested mire of Kashmir politics. He had stood by Sheikh Sahib. His well wishers had no doubt that he alone deserved to be given the leadership role as the representative of the next generation within the party. He was, so to speak, the true political heir to Sheikh Abdullah.

“He possesses political experience and besides, he is much younger to Beg Sahib and surely in much better health.”

Such were the ideas and perceptions of the party workers in the two dominant groups at that time. Arguments from both sides were equally weighty. But, as is often to be seen in many such situations, God willed otherwise. An entirely new scenario unfolded before us. The tug-of-war between the two groups became part of a history of another human endeavour in the variegated drama of life.

In the voting held for the election of members to the Legislative Council the legislators owing allegiance to the Beg Group flouted the orders of the party high command regarding voting. Thereby, they ensured victory of candidates from their own group. These developments provided a long handle to the members of the G.M. Shah group to needle their opponents from time to time.

During this period Begum Abdullah was also actively reviving many neglected activities in the field of social welfare, family health and welfare, women's emancipation, the Indian Red Cross Society and opening of new institutions for the training of girls in various independent vocations. She was actively taking interest in the work of the All India Women's Conference, the Family Planning Association of India, and many other national and state level organizations for the benefit of women and children in particular. Her work in these organizations had encouraged a large number of women workers to make worthwhile contribution to the life of the community. Through personal example and dedicated work, Begum Abdullah was communicating a new message of hope to the illiterate and backward population of women in our society.

These activities also provided a massive political support base to the National Conference.

As an active party worker I was also associated with these organizations which involved travelling and visiting the women's welfare and social welfare centres in many villages of the valley. It was heartening to see the growing interest of the womenfolk in the new vistas that were opening before them. One did realize, however, that lot more of work had to be done, particularly to fight many prejudices and obscure social restrictions. Nonetheless, a good headstart had been given to those activities which had the highest potential for fostering healthy change and socio-economic development.

At the same time the electronic media, the radio and television were taking keen interest in communicating the need for social change to the people. In this connection, I was invited by these media alongwith Begum Abdullah, as well as others in the area of social work, to participate in many of their programmes designed for the purpose. The viewpoint of the government, the welfare organizations and the feedback of the people in respect of such activities would be openly and thoroughly discussed. Many such programmes were moderated by eminent media persons who would ensure that the programmes were not merely a kowtowing of the establishment's line of thinking. I enjoyed these encounters thoroughly and was pleased to discover that communication with the people was very fruitful.

Chapter 8

Bhutto Hanged

IN April 1979 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had been deposed as Prime Minister of Pakistan in July 1977, and later tried for murder was sentenced to death by hanging. His was a very controversial trial. The martial law ruler of Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq had been promoted out of turn as army chief of Pakistan by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto himself when he was the Prime Minister. Now it was Zia-ul-Haq who was widely believed to have got Bhutto framed up for the murder trial. Worldwide appeals for grant of mercy to Bhutto were not heeded by Zia-ul-Haq, and the tragic end of Bhutto's stormy career became an unbelievable reality.

Pakistan was founded in 1947 as a theocratic state based on the religion of Islam. Anyone could be accused of going against the Islamic tenets and face the same fate as Bhutto's. Zia-ul-Haq had cleverly moulded himself as a pragmatist with a hard core fundamentalist loyalty who projected himself as the protector of religion and rights of the Musalmans. He was closely allied to the religious and political outfit of the Jamat-i-Islami, and other extreme right wing political parties of Pakistan. After the ouster of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, General Zia attempted to mould Pakistan according to Islamic laws. This suited his plans for carrying the reactionary and religious fanatics as his vehement supporters for the military dictatorship that had then replaced the nascent democracy in Pakistan. These Islamic laws had their immediate repercussions on the social fabric of the country.

Women in Pakistan were ordered to get themselves under the veil in public places. According to Islamic Personal Law, there came into existence new laws adversely affecting the rights of women in respect of marriage, divorce and property. Similarly

men were to strictly follow an Islamic code of conduct or else face dire consequences and punishment according to Islamic laws. One of these such punishments included stoning a person to death in public for committing the crime of adultery. And, it was not long before such primitive punishment was carried out on the soil of Pakistan during Zia's rule. According to these laws a woman is not a fully credible witness in a court of law. In order to consolidate his position, Zia saw to it that his new decrees were strictly followed. The Jamat-i-Islami and its die-hard cadres became the watchdogs of the military dictatorship as well as its vehement supporters in public.

Invariably the people in the Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir in India were not unaware of the political goings on in the neighbouring country. Now that Pakistan was ostensibly being run on Islamic basis, it was natural for the Muslim population in the state to have an affinity for the new dispensation in Pakistan. Spanish cows always seem to have long horns.

Many people believed that nobody would be ill fed or naked in an Islamic society, rather, there would be abundance of everything and prosperity all around. If someone stole, his hands and ears would be cut and the thief would be paraded in the streets. Thereby nobody would indulge in theft again. Often people would discuss at small gatherings the type of democracy in our country and compare it with Pakistan.

"A person committing theft is to be tried in a court of law. And for all you know, he may not be convicted at all."

"Well, committing a theft might be a minor matter. If somebody commits a murder in broad daylight, he is to be tried by a court. He might succeed to get a reprieve! Such weak governments do not exist in the Islamic countries."

"A woman of loose character can get away with anything here. But in Pakistan she will be stoned to death."

Although the number of people who believed in such arguments was small, one could see that some hard core and committed people who were cadres of the Jamat-i-Islami, were nonetheless spreading such thinking vehemently amongst the population.

The news of Zulfikar Ali's death by hanging spread like wild-

fire. People were stunned and benumbed. The good dreams about Islamic justice were suddenly shattered to pieces. Processions spontaneously came out on the streets from every direction. Shops and establishments remained closed. People were enraged against the military dictatorship of Pakistan. Was this the type of justice sought when Pakistan was created? Are those the acts based on Islamic teachings? Is this what is ordered in the holy Quran? A great political leader's life is ended thus, and that too in the name of Islam? These were some obvious questions that people in Kashmir were repeatedly asking and discussing. The intensity of the people's anger could be gauged by the fact that some indulged in the sacrilegious act of tearing pages of holy books and scattering the same in utter disgust.

"We don't want such Islam. You betrayers of Islam!" these were the shouts of the angry people from the core of their heart alongwith the continuous chanting of "La Allah ill-lal-lah", and "Allah-o-Akbar", echoing from the skies.

My neighbour dropped in at my house on that day. She was crying while she said to me, "The way Bhutto has been eliminated by Zia now, the same will be his fate one day. He will certainly have to suffer for his grave misdeeds."

"Inspite of appeals for mercy by world leaders, Zia did not relent from his course", I told my neighbour.

"He will die miserably! He has the cheek to call himself a Musalman! He should be called a murderer of Islam" my friend went on to express her resentment, anger and remorse over the happenings.

The strike and "Bandh" continued for a second day. We got into a sulky mood and I went out with my husband for a long walk in the Kashmir university campus situated nearby. As we were coming out of the REC Campus gate we saw a large procession moving on the road. Leading the procession was a frail and screaming street dog tied with a rope and led by a young boy. The dog was shrieking in agony. There was a torn hat placed on his head. Hanging from its neck was a cardboard placard with the sign "Zia Dog" written in bold letters on it. Other boys in the crowd carried sticks and rods with which they were mercilessly

beating the dog turn by turn as the procession moved on. The dog was howling in excruciating pain and foaming at the mouth.

Its howling pierced our ear drums. I was horrified to witness this ugly sight and took pity on the poor animal. I couldn't help shouting out, "Please let the dog free. It'll die, poor creature. Don't be cruel."

The boys shouted back in an angry chorus, "Let him die! It is the black dog, the murderer!"

"No, no. Not black dog. It's the black cobra", shouted the boys in unison.

"Take this stick and you also beat him, this bastard", said one of the boys while trying to hand over a stick to me.

"No, please no. Stop this nonsense", I said and moved away from the crowd fearing that they might in this frenzy turn their anger on me.

The people were not only angry with the government of Pakistan but also with the Jamat-i-Islami, who they believed to be the main perpetrators of this sordid political murder. In fact, the adherents of the Jamat in Kashmir had boasted to the local people and justified Bhutto's death by hanging. This had enraged the people, and without caring for the consequences, they took law into their own hands while they beat and harassed Jamat workers in public. A number of homes belonging to the members and active workers of the Jamat were destroyed in arson. Many were forced to shave their beards in public. Fear of such torture gripped so many people that many Kashmiri youngmen earlier sporting the typical Jamat beard quietly and voluntarily went about with clean shaven faces. Leaders of the Jamat were insulted in public and some adherents were subjected to callous spitting by rude young people.

Lot of propaganda literature and pamphlets published by this party earlier was seized and destroyed in bonfires. These acts were carried out by people who are otherwise normal and law abiding citizens of the towns and villages.

Outwardly there was a stoppage of all activity by the members of the party. Nobody expected however, that the little sparks of anger and hatred left behind by these episodes would one day

reappear again and explode like a dormant volcano. The spark of vengeance had been ignited. The Jamat had vehemently resolved to wreak vengeance one day on Sheikh Abdullah and his party, the National Conference, and its large number of simple followers in every part of Kashmir. Then they would be given a fitting taste of revenge. This resolve was communicated to the people in subdued but not uncertain terms.

Baisakhi is a spring festival celebrated in mid-April every year in many parts of northern India. In Kashmir the festival is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, who throng the lovely Mughal Gardens from every part of the valley. Spring blossoms are at their loveliest at this time of the year. The Sikhs in particular celebrate the day as a religious festival also. I remember the day, when on this occasion, the students of the Regional Engineering College in Srinagar arranged a gala dinner for themselves to celebrate the festivities. The Sikh students ordered "Jhatka" chicken for the menu, the Muslims ordered "halal" meat, and for the vegetarians there was cottage cheese. When the meals were cooked separately in the common mess and the feast was to begin in a couple of hours, there arose a serious problem.

Some students wanted to foment communal discord. Besides affecting the work and atmosphere within the college, a communal clash would pose a serious problem for the government as well. It was reported by students belonging to the Jamat-i-Tulba that some Sikh students had mixed "Jhatka" chicken with the "halal" meat in the kitchens. This caused tension amongst students which could flare up and later spread within the state, embarrassing the Chief Minister, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah. The students of the Sikh community were equally apprehensive and suspected that their chicken curry had also been contaminated by "halal" meat. It may be mentioned that Sikhs don't eat "halal" meat and Muslims don't eat "Jhatka" meat. It is the process of killing the animal that varies in the two systems. Fortunately, the tension was located in the nick of time by college staff and the menu of chicken and meat was discarded forthwith being replaced by cottage cheese for all. Thereby, a major communal flare up

was avoided.

Around the same time communal riots were reported from many parts of the country. Even in those situations, the spark was provided by detection of a cow's head in the premises of a Hindu temple or that of pork in the compound of a Muslim mosque. These sparks could then easily be fanned into frightening communal orgies. The enemies of the secular polity of the country seem to succeed every time in such nefarious deeds which caused riots in a concerted and regular pattern every now and then. How far these forces of disruption succeed is difficult for me to assess. But I do feel that every Indian is apprehensive and worried about these periodical happenings. Rightly, the question arises: How long shall this sort of tragedy go on? Even forty five years after we became a free and sovereign nation, these things happen. Is our future secure? One tends to lose faith and confidence in our people and our value system while seeking answers to these perpetual queries.

Begum Abdullah was to arrive in Srinagar from Jammu. Her younger daughter Prof. Surraya Mattoo was ready to go to the airport to receive her mother. I also joined her and we waited in the VIP lounge at the airport where we received Begum Sahiba soon after. Immediately, conversation began about Bhutto's hanging in Pakistan.

"Mummy, we couldn't sleep on that night. Nobody could indeed. How mercilessly Bhutto was hanged", Surraya informed her mother.

"There were mourners' processions by the people, here in town. And people shouted a lot of abuse against General Zia", I added.

"The military rulers of Pakistan are blind-folded. They seem to have lost all sense of fairness and justice, right and wrong", said Begum Abdullah with a deep sigh.

"People are saying that Sheikh Sahib's decision to join Kashmir's polity with that of India was the right one. We see what the Pakistanis are suffering. What would have been our condition?", Surraya said this with an obvious air of confidence, sug-

gesting that there could be hardly any doubt about such a response from the people.

"In our democratic polity even hanging a condemned criminal in this manner would be a shame", said Begum Sahiba, emphasizing the farsightedness of Sheikh Abdullah. She paused a little, and added, "People have realized this fact now! My 'Sartaj' (revered husband) had not taken any decisions thoughtlessly", said Begum Sahiba with understandable pride showing on her face.

I told them about the poor "dog's" procession seen by me a few days earlier. Hearing this, Begum Sahiba sighed and said, "What fault had the poor dog committed? The people here are ignorant. God only knows when they will get rid of such mentality completely?"

"They tore and burnt the pages of the holy books", said Suraya with anguish.

Alongside these goings-on, there were every now and then, attempts by the Jamat-i-Islami and the Awami Action Committee of Maulana Farooq and other likeminded political groups to foment skirmishes and rioting on one pretext or the other. These attempts were, however, handled well and foiled by an alert administration under the Sheikh's political supremacy and strict control.

On the occasion of the fortieth day ceremony after the death of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, these groups had again decided to create some problems for the law and order authorities. There was apprehension of trouble in every heart, particularly because the government was in the winter capital at Jammu. Sheikh Sahib, however, paid a visit to Srinagar at this time. He addressed a congregation of people at Hazratbal and made an enthusiastic and emotional speech. The people were relieved and sang abundant praises for him admiring his deft handling of a delicate situation.

There was also a political rally organized at Mujahid Manzil. People had thronged from far and wide to attend this rally. On this occasion also Sheikh Abdullah made a clear and sincere address to the people reminding them of their glorious traditions and focusing their vision towards the multifarious developmental tasks

lying ahead. Sheikh Sahib had a total feel of and a firm grip over the pulse of the people. He knew precisely what medicine was to be prescribed and when, to the bewildered people for giving them solace. He would weave his speech dextrously, tailoring it to the needs of the Kashmiri psyche. I have seen Sheikh Abdullah getting excited and angry while addressing people, but suddenly, the next moment, he would coolly convey something without a trace of the earlier anger. He was deeply committed and sincere. People would discuss his moods amongst themselves and say, "His bad temper does not arise out of any malice. It is his love for the people that makes him angry. He is deeply concerned with our plight. His commitment to our cause is total."

When the rally ended, some people went into his room to have a separate meeting with him. I was also present on the occasion. Sheikh Sahib was in a cheerful mood. He smiled while he addressed us:

"Well, have you done something? I'm told people taught them a good lesson?" saying these words he moved his right hand over his chair in a suggestive gesture.

Everybody looked at him with smile on their faces. No words were uttered. There was no doubt in our minds that he was referring to the doings of Jamat-i-Islami and the severe reaction of the people against their activities.

"They won't raise their heads again", said one of the workers present.

"Their arrogance had crossed all limits. They deserved a rebuff by the people. This served them well," said another.

Then Sheikh Sahib listened to the feedback information from workers of different districts. This went on for a long while and Sheikh Sahib was relaxed and in no hurry to break this gathering.

On 25th August, 1979, a public meeting was organized by the National Conference in the old Hazoori Bagh (now named Iqbal Park). The vast area of the park was filled to capacity with people from the city and nearby villages. Many stalwarts spoke on the occasion. But the people were keen to hear Sheikh Sahib for whose "darshan" they had come from far off crossing many hurdles.

It was in this park that Sheikh Sahib had made his famous speech to the people of Kashmir after his release from jail by the Maharaja of Kashmir, at the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi who visited Kashmir for the first and the last time that memorable summer. The name of the park was changed that day and as the new name "IQBAL PARK" was announced, there was loud applause by the people welcoming the new name commemorating the famous poet of India, Sir Mohammad Iqbal, a person of Kashmiri origin and inspirer of Sheikh Abdullah in his youth. In his speech Sheikh Sahib recounted Iqbal's greatness and his love for Kashmir and its people.

There was another interesting event going on in Srinagar while the Iqbal Park was inaugurated. This was the first ever cricket match played in Srinagar between the North Zone team of India against a team from Australia. Kashmiris, like many others in the sub-continent, are mad about cricket and people had paid good sums to obtain tickets for witnessing the match. The enclosures were full. A large number of tourists and people from neighbouring states who love cricket had also come to Srinagar to witness the match. The match was interesting and well conducted. The players as well as the spectators went back quite pleased with the show.

Chapter 9

Ladakh Visit

EVERY year in the month of September most Kashmiri Pandits cook sweet “Roth” (pancakes) for thanksgiving to goddess Mother Khirbhavani. This occasion is given the name “Pun” (which means thread, cf. spun). The pancake is prepared from fine flour, ghee, and sugar with poppy seeds used for decoration and sprinkling on top for flavour. Black cardamom is also added for a special aroma. After the pancakes are prepared, thanksgiving prayers are offered. Stories from tradition highlighting the values of faith, devotion and prayer are retold by elders and the pancake is offered to the goddess with love. Thereafter, the pancakes, as “Prasadam”, are given to relations, friends, neighbours. Usually for a week or ten days every Kashmiri Pandit’s household offers “roth” with “Kahwa”-tea to the guests. Our Muslim friends look forward to this occasion for a change.

These customs are centuries old. It is a thanksgiving to God for His showering mercy and bounties on us. People pray and appeal for peace, happiness and prosperity.

In my home we celebrated this occasion on 5th September 1979. That day I got up very early in the morning and was through with the making of pancakes and prayers etc. by 9 o’clock. The same day I had to proceed to Leh, capital of Ladakh province of the state, with Mekhla Jha. Her husband, L.K. Jha, was the Governor of Kashmir, and Madam Jha was the Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board in the State. I was a member of this Board and was overseeing the work of training centres for carpetweaving established by the Board. This was my first visit to Leh.

At 9 o’clock sharp Mrs. Jha alongwith her troupe of officials arrived at our house in Hazratbal. I was pleased to see Mrs. Jha and welcomed her. I offered them the fresh “prasad” of pancakes. While she accepted a bite, she said with a smile, “This little

won't do, Khemlataji! Better carry all that you have in a tiffin box."

"We'll be quite hungry en route. And these pancakes are so tasty," added Mr. Piplani, who was Personal Secretary to the Governor and helped Madam Jha with the work of the Social Welfare Board as well.

"You have this 'prasad' please. Don't worry, we have more for the road", saying this I asked my helper to pack the pancakes for our journey.

Mr. Piplani, Mrs. Jha and I sat in one car and left for Leh ahead of others. Behind us moved the other cars. At Sonamarg we halted for some rest and had some tea. We ate "roth" with our tea. Then moved on for the next leg of the journey.

In the course of this journey I had some memorable experiences. I found Mrs. Jha to be a very compassionate and a noble person.

She felt a lot of empathy for the poor and the deprived. I noticed throughout the journey, she was turning beads of the "manka" rosary she was carrying with her. When we stopped conversation, I could see her back at work with the rosary under her shawl. When I noticed the rosary and her frequent movements with it, I became curious and could not resist asking her:

"Madam, it's four hours since we have been travelling. In-between, I had a wink of sleep as well. And perhaps Piplani Sahib too had a nap. But I haven't seen you even blink! And this rosary, you have been turning all the time?", I asked pointing toward her hand.

"I am chanting 'mantras' (specific short prayers). I have tremendous faith in this. My whole life is centred and founded on this belief", Mekhlaji replied with a broad smile.

"Even while you are talking with us, you keep on turning the beads with your hand. Don't you lose concentration while conversing?", I enquired.

"This is a matter of practice. Even while I am talking, deep down inside me I am chanting the 'Mantra' ", Mekhlaji replied. with an aura of deeper spirituality in her words. I was much attracted by this. With a slight pause, I asked her again, "You are a 'Siddha'! (spiritually arrived person). Please bestow your grace

on me and give me some 'Guru Mantra' (spiritual master's words to his disciple)".

She laughed when she heard this.

"I have told Madam about this many times before", said Pip-lani Sahib, who was sitting by the side of the driver in the front seat, and had turned round to join the conversation.

"Everyone has to acquire and concentrate on one's own 'mantra'. One has to meditate deeply", said Mekhlaji. After this she avoided any further queries from us.

Ahead of Sonamarg, the road to the Zojila Pass was quite rough. There were clouds of dust raised as our cars moved along. The majestic mountains alongside were almost touching the skies. Bare and denuded, there was not a blade of grass over these hills and not a single tree anywhere. The mountains truly looked like majestic Himalayan sentinels of our land. There was more to see. The valleys and the ridges surrounding them provided a deep contrast as the rays of the bright sun shone over the peaks. The height and sheer massiveness of the peaks was awe-inspiring. The rays of light produced a colourful collage as if made up of dazzling stones and sparkling jewels. The colours shone like those of a bright rainbow in the sky and I was wonder-struck to see such breathtaking beauty produced by mere rocks without a leaf, or a tree or greenery present. These wondrous colours mysteriously produced, how and by whom? These thoughts remained deep in my memory.

On the first night of our tour we stayed at the Guest House at Kargil. There was another lady, Roma Wani, sharing the room with me. She was also a member of our touring party. She was interested in journalism and was a freelancer at that time. We got to know each other well and she proved a compatible person.

Ms. Roma was born in Gujarat in a Hindu family and was married to a Muslim in Kashmir. In the course of our conversation, I came to know that Roma Wani had accepted Islam as her faith after her marriage. Curious to know more I asked her a few questions:

"Did you see any changes in you after you accepted Islam your faith?"

"No", replied Roma.

"Then why did you change your faith at all? Wouldn't you make a good wife without such a change?", I asked her.

"My husband was keen about it. I wanted to please him", Roma replied.

"You love him intensely?"

"If I didn't love him so, would I go that far?"

"What did you have to go through to become a Musalman?"

"I recited the 'Kalima' (the holy words proclaiming the oneness and uniqueness of God)."

"What else? If I also recite these holy words, (I recited the 'Kalima' myself) do I also become a Musalman?"

"Now what?" I said and we laughed together.

"When I wrote to my parents that I am becoming a Musalman, they were quite shocked. They had thought I would now grow horns on my head!" Roma added with a touch of sadness in her voice.

"Did you meet your parents again?", I asked.

"They were hesitant to see me, in the first place, fearing something terrible might have happened to me. But when we finally met, they were relieved. Their apprehensions were gone. And repeatedly they would say, 'Oh! you are the same as before. You haven't changed a bit.' As if my face would change with the change of my faith! What strange notions people carry in their minds?" Roma explained at length.

In the night, during her sleep Roma was uttering the names of God, Ya Allah!, Ya Karim, many a time which I heard clearly. I thought she was not perhaps fast asleep. I called out to her up. She didn't. She was too tired because of the journey and I thought it was only fair to let her sleep.

Munshi Habib Ullah was at that time a minister in the Cabinet of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah. He belonged to Kargil in the Ladakh region. During the day he had arranged a well attended public meeting in Mrs. Jha's honour, who addressed the audience. She spoke about the developments initiated by the Social Welfare Board in respect of Carpet Centres, Creches and schools for children, Centres for teaching embroidery work to girls, and the assistance provided for these ventures including the rearing of good quality sheep. She also gave details about the opening of

more such centres in that area. As a member of the National Conference as well as Member of the Social Welfare Board, I too had to address the audience, and I confined my speech to explain the work being done by the Board and how the people could derive maximum benefit from these activities.

Next day, in the early morning, we moved on towards Leh. En route, when we were near the Gumpa at Mulbech (monastery of Mulbech), which is not far from Kargil, a large number of Buddhist monks in their yellow-red robes surrounded our vehicles. Mrs. Jha and we were all taken aback. The Buddhist monks were shouting and saying, "Our girl has been kidnapped by a Muslim teacher. Madam, please do something about it."

"They have made our lives impossible. Such incidents are taking place every now and then", all of them together were shouting these words,

"What is the matter? If you keep on shouting like this, Madam will not follow what you want to convey. Speak one by one," Mr. Piplani was trying to pacify the crowd and make them see reason. They were pacified somewhat by his intervention, and one person explained: "Madam, a Buddhist girl, a teacher works in a nearby school. One of the Muslim teachers of the school has enticed and kidnapped the girl."

"They must have wanted to go that way. How can an adult girl be kidnapped otherwise?" replied Mrs. Jha.

No sooner had Mrs. Jha said these words then the entire crowd was enraged. They retorted back and said:

"No Madam, this is not the truth. In the first place this girl was harassed. Then she was coerced to marry this teacher. She was also forced to convert herself to Islam."

"She was lured by the incentive of promotion. If this sort of situation continues then nobody is going to heed our complaints", a lot of people were shouting together in the crowd.

The matter appeared to be serious, and Mrs. Jha was keen to settle the dust and resolve the issue. Very calmly she said, "You should have no anxiety. We will bring this problem to the attention of the government. They will thoroughly investigate the matter, and let any injustice done to you be undone." There was lot of empathy and compassion in Mrs. Jha's words and the crowd

of people were quietened. I wonder if they trusted our words or not, but they did make way for our vehicles and let our caravan pass.

I liked the people of Leh more than I liked Leh itself. These people were good and full of love. Their innocence was visible on their faces and it was deeply touching. It seemed that the struggles, sycophancy, hypocrisy, and selfishness of the modern world had not touched them. I was charmed by their simplicity. I shall never be able to forget the civilized behaviour of these people. In fact I sincerely prayed to God, "Let this innocence and simplicity prevail because this is the nation's wealth." It was these beautiful basic values that made India famous and capable of spreading its ideas throughout the world.

Next day, we went to many Gumpas in and around Leh. When we visited the Spituk Gumpas we found lamas chanting prayers inside a long hall and seated in rows. Alongside, there was a person who was producing loud drum beats pounding on a large drum, and there was sound of cymbals beating rhythmically.

The "mantras" of the prayer were sung with such clarity and melody that it had a strange effect on my heart. I also sat in a meditative posture in one corner of the hall. What I felt, how I experienced an unique phenomenon, and the effect it had on my life, are matters which would not be appropriate to mention here. But when I came out of the hall, all my colleagues who had been waiting for me outside the hall, stared at me as though I had been transformed into a different person.

"You sat inside as if you would stay here for ever", all of them said in one voice.

"We thought, we might have to go to Srinagar without you", added Mr. Piplani.

"Dr. Wakhlu (my husband) would sue us", joked Mrs. Jha.

I looked at my watch and found a lot of time had elapsed!

"I didn't realize this while sitting there", I said.

"We thought we have lost you", said Mekhlaji.

"You have found me again, after losing me", I said.

Chapter 10

Mid-Term Poll 1980

AROUND this time the country was in the grip of preparation for a mid-term elections to the parliament. The Janta Party government was dissolved due to its own inner dissensions which had necessitated the fresh elections.

In that connection Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah came to Mujahid Manzil around 3 p.m. The agenda of the meeting included mainly the selection of candidates for the parliamentary elections and declaring their names in public. There had, however, been a lot of rumour in the newspapers, and even the party workers were, to some extent, aware of the fact, that Dr. Farooq Abdullah would be nominated for the Srinagar constituency. Political circles considered his choice a foregone conclusion. Sheikh Sahib addressed the meeting and said:

“Dr. Farooq is keen to join politics. We tried to persuade him not to jump in the fray because the path is laden with thorns. I gave him my personal example to convince him and told him that the going can be tough in politics. I don’t know if you can cope up with it.” He says, “I am always eager to serve my people.”

“What is your opinion?” Sheikh Sahib asked the audience in his loving style. They however, kept quiet because he had said all that was needed to be said, and there wasn’t really much purpose in getting the people’s opinion.

Political workers from all the three regions of the state were collected here. Then suddenly one person said “yes”, and everyone else was awakened as if were from slumber.

“Yes, of course, Dr. Farooq Abdullah is an educated young-man. Who else can represent us better in the parliament?”, they said in one voice.

Sheikh Sahib was pleased to hear these words and after a pause

he said; "We have chosen Ghulam Rasool Kochak for Anantnag and Saif-ud-din Soz for Baramulla constituencies?"

Some other minor issues were discussed at the meeting and thereafter people dispersed.

Sheikh Rashid offered me a lift to drop me home. Some of his workers also accompanied us in the same car. We talked and at one point Sheikh Rashid asked:

"How and where did they get hold of Mr. Soz? Is there any dearth of politically active workers here?"

"He was a professor and has been picked up from the University", said one of the workers.

"Nowadays no one cares about the sacrifices made in the past. We have struggled and suffered."

"Come on! Why on earth are you getting so dejected? Our time is going to come too. Better late than never! Am I right, Khemji?" said another in reply, seeking an approving nod from me at the same time.

"Of course, you are absolutely right."

"If you really ask me, this Kochak family has always been with us through thick and thin. If they become partners in political power and government, it hurts no one", said another person.

"In politics all such things do happen, You shouldn't delve too deep into these matters", said Sheikh Rashid in an effort to change the subject.

For a few years now, 5th of December was being celebrated as the birthday of Sheikh Sahib. On this day we went to congratulate him. The lawns of his residence were filled with people who were making a beeline to shake hands with him and offer their congratulations. Because of extreme cold at this time, he was wearing a large white embroidered gown. Under the awnings pitched in the lawn a number of coalfired stoves were lit which provided some warmth to the visitors. While they waited they swarmed near the stoves to warm their hands and feet.

As Sheikh Sahib retired into his residence after a brief "darshan" to the people, I followed him into his room. As we

entered, I saw Mr. Mohi-ud-din Malik, the Speaker of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly already sitting and waiting inside. We helped ourselves to some resins, cashew nuts and apricots offered on the table for guests on this occasion and began talking about the political affairs in the country. There was hardly a month left for the elections to the parliament. Everybody was apprehensive about the results of the election.

"There will be a coalition govt. again. It looks impossible for the Congress(I) to get an absolute majority," said Mr. Malik giving the impression that it was not only his personal opinion but rather a well founded fact.

"No, this isn't so, Malik Sahib," I said rebutting his argument with emphasis. "People are fed up with the Janta Government and nobody is going to let them have power again. Three years have been a catastrophe, and the people well understand all this", I added.

"The voters' psychology is entirely different. People's memories are short, and they forget all that has happened in the past. You'll see I would be proved right", replied Malik.

Sheikh Sahib was affectionately watching and listening to our dialogue like a teacher observing two of his students during a debate in a class room!

"Congress (I) will win outright. It won't need any internal or external support. And our National Conference too shall win with a thumping majority. You can take my word on this!" As I said this Sheikh Sahib was pleased, he smiled and said, "Has the campaign begun?"

"Yes, it has begun, but it will gain momentum now."

In the meanwhile some more people came in to congratulate Sheikh Sahib.

On this day there was also a public meeting at the party headquarters at Mujahid Manzil. Speaker after speaker referred to the role played by Sheikh Sahib during his life for the people's liberation. The dream of "New Kashmir" was again the focus of attention and new efforts to realize the dream were afoot. The candidates nominated for the election were introduced to the party

workers. Of course, Dr. Farooq was already well known to the people. He was the loved one, the darling of the people. As soon as he got up on the dais, people greeted him with a loud applause of cheers and heard his speech attentively and happily.

The government of Jammu and Kashmir had built a new tourist bungalow at the famous tourist resort of Gulmarg. Sheikh Sahib had to open this bungalow to the public in this very month of December. I was also invited to the opening ceremony function. The function was organized by the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation under the Chairmanship of Mr. Tariq Abdullah, the younger son of Sheikh Sahib. Along with me some other office bearers of the National Conference were also invited to the Gulmarg celebrations. After Sheikh Sahib formally opened the bungalow, following behind him, we all went round the various rooms of the tourist complex.

Gulmarg is very cold at this time of the year and this new building had been fitted with a central heating system. Installing of this system was, in fact, Tariq Abdullah's brainchild and he had taken keen interest in the work. No doubt, the complex had been thoughtfully built, but within a few years, when I saw the building again, it was in a bad shape. Conventional coal-fired stoves were heating the rooms as elsewhere. On enquiry, I was informed that all the pipes had burst and broken and were working no more.

Sheikh Sahib was very fond of good food. On that day however, for medical reasons, food had been separately prepared for him. But when he saw the courses I had in my plate, he asked:

"They haven't served me all these dishes?"

"Food is specially prepared for you", I replied and pointed to the table for him.

In a corner of the dining hall where food for us was laid on a large central table meals for Sheikh Sahib were laid on a separate table.

He ignored my reply and called out loud to a bearer, "Get me some 'Kabab'." The bearer ran back and promptly returned with a plate full of 'kababs'. And Sheikh Sahib ate it all quickly. I was amazed to see this. Later he topped his meal with a sumptuous

dessert of melon.

"It isn't good for you to take this sweet fruit, Sheikh Sahib! Don't have any more, please", I implored.

He was wearing a shalwar-kurta dress through which his paunch was distinctly visible.

"Since when have you become a physician?", he asked me with a smile.

"When I learnt that you have diabetes", I said.

My words of caution had no effect whatsoever on him. But, like a child, he went on eating what he shouldn't have, or what he was told not to have.

The election campaign was now at its peak. I was participating and speaking at public meetings, canvassing support in favour of Dr. Farooq. Inside the many dense areas of Srinagar city, I would address people in meetings; and wherever I went, people greeted me with cheers of welcome. Particularly, I was delighted to see an enhanced enthusiasm amongst the womenfolk. Somehow they felt a strange nearness to me and believed that their concerns would get well deserved attention with empathy from a woman.

On one occasion, during this campaign, I accompanied Dr. Farooq on an election tour of village Chadoora and the areas around. En route we stopped near a village and Dr. Farooq got down to meet some women who were standing by the roadside. As he moved ahead approaching towards the ladies, they ran away and rather excitedly and shyly watched him from a distance. As I saw him returning back, I too got down from the car and approached the ladies. As they saw me move towards them, they came closer and surrounded me. Our eyes met and I said: "Why did you run away? What is there to fear? Here is Farooq Sahib. You must vote for him", I added pointing towards Dr. Farooq. The women had a hearty laugh and soon thereafter, more women came out of their homes and joined them. I repeated my request for votes again and they responded and said: "We have already given him our votes. Haven't we?"

"No, you haven't yet. There is still two weeks to go for voting." To this statement of mine they all responded in unison and said: "Our votes are already with you."

I looked at them with some surprise.

"Take it for granted our votes are with you. Who else do we vote for except Sher-i-Kashmir?"

Thereupon, I shouted a few slogans:

"Long live National Conference! Long live Farooq Abdullah! Long live Sher-i-Kashmir."

The women gave a full throated response and joined with enthusiasm and vigour repeating the slogans after me.

As I entered the car, Dr. Farooq said to the M.L.A. from Chadoora, who was sitting with him: "With Khemlataji around the women turned out in large numbers without any hesitation. They run away if they just see us."

"Of course," replied the M.L.A.

"Didn't you notice how they ran away? As if we were going to catch them," said Farooq with a smile.

"In the villages the womenfolk are still very shy. Unlike the women in the cities, they are rather unawares of these affairs."

"You must be deliberately keeping them way behind, lest they overtake you", Dr. Farooq said to Mr. Nengroo, the M.L.A. Both I and Mr. Nengroo had a hearty laugh over the remark.

Later that day we addressed a large congregation. Among others, Mr. Nengroo and I spoke to the people. As Dr. Farooq rose to speak, he praised me rather too much. He told the audience that in our "New Kashmir" we need to see more women of my calibre. I was terribly embarrassed.

Around this time the new fundamentalist and Islamic Republic of Iran had appeared on the world scene. Ayatullah Khoemeni had become the new ruler of Iran. Understandably, these events had their impact on our life in the valley. The astounding victory of the Islamic clergy in Iran was the first ever victory of the fundamentalists which gave a new lease of life and encouragement to adherents of Jamat-i-Islami in Kashmir. The dream of establishing Nizam-e-Mustafa in the valley began to crystallize in their minds again with a renewed vigour.

The results of election to the Indian Parliament began to come in

around January 1980. The National Conference and the Congress (I) had together bagged all the seats in Jammu and Kashmir. In the Centre the Congress(I) led by Indira Gandhi had come out victorious. The occasion was celebrated by the workers of the National Conference at the party headquarters at Mujahid Manzil with great enthusiasm, which was not even dampened by the prevailing severe cold.

I made a speech from All India Radio, Srinagar, highlighting the reasons for the success of the National Conference in the elections.

Soon after the elections, there was sudden commotion amongst N.C. workers as someone mentioned that Mr. G.M. Shah had resigned from the Cabinet. This development came as a total surprise to me, but I was even more intrigued when I talked the matter over to Abdul Samad Teli and Sheikh Rashid, my party colleagues who were around.

"What would be the consequences of this action? Hope the party's image wouldn't be tarnished?" I asked.

"Shah Sahib knows for certain that his resignation will not be accepted. Rather, he will be persuaded to withdraw his request", replied Teli who was sitting M.L.A. those days.

"You seem to be talking with such certainty. Appears you're in the know of things."

"We've known their antics for long years now. He is quite adept in creating such scenes", replied Samad Sahib.

"But, why does he have to do so?"

"In order to emphasize that he's indispensable."

Thereupon, even Sheikh Rashid had endorsed what Samad Sahib was saying.

"What would be the effect of such childlike outbursts?" I had asked.

"Talk of image? You're thinking in terms of rules and procedures in England and Germany. Such things don't work here. It's politics! politics! You'll take a long time to learn these paces", added Sheikh Rashid with a smile.

"Such cheap politics?"

"You don't know. This action will enhance his political clout",

clarified Sheikh Rashid.

“Coming to think of it, such actions arise out of haste and anger?” I said.

“He is much better these days. He was much worse before. I should know, he’s my brother-in-law.”

Both my colleagues were proved right. The resignation of G.M. Shah was not accepted.

During the course of election of members to the Upper House of the J & K Assembly, there arose considerable tension between the followers of Sheikh Sahib and Beg Sahib respectively. At the party headquarters one could distinctly perceive the loyalties of most people and where these lay. I was very eager to see that groupism within the ranks of members does not escalate, which might lead to breaking of the party.

Groupism could have destroyed the organization and left the party helpless in the face of any impending crisis.

I recollect a meeting at Mujahid Manzil around this time. The members present didn’t bother about the agenda of the meeting. Instead, one by one they began to spew venom against the party stalwarts present in the meeting. The workers were very hostile and it appeared they would pounce in anger on the leaders present.

A plethora of their complaints and utterances were shouted out at the leaders like a volley of bullets and arrows from their abundant arsenal. The words were meant to hurt deeply.

Somehow the meeting was over, and people left the hall with cooler tempers. I came to know from my colleagues that the most vociferous workers, who had been very critical of party leaders, were amongst those who were loyal to Beg Sahib. They were hell bent on spoiling the meeting. I was sad and distressed to see such unruly behaviour, and sincerely believed that this kind of uncivilized deportment did not behove workers of a reputed political party.

Chapter 11

Political Goings-on

SHEIKH Rashid, nephew of Sheikh Sahib, was taking good care of the people in his uncle's constituency in Ganderbal in Kashmir. He would also occasionally tour the constituency and had established a "Social Welfare Committee" for the help of the people. It was a purely non-political welfare organization of which he himself was the Chairman.

One day I accompanied him on a tour of the Ganderbal area. I witnessed lot of enthusiastic support and welcome given to Sheikh Rashid in village after village. At many places small pieces of snow white sugar candy were showered over him in the traditional style of the Kashmiris. The people felt that he had come to meet them on behalf of Sheikh Abdullah himself. Being his nephew was an obvious plus point. Talking to the villagers in small groups while on tour, he would say:

"Inspite of our many engagements, we have your welfare always in mind. It may be that Sheikh Sahib is not able to come personally, we are with you here to share your concerns and woes."

Everywhere the people had innumerable problems and complaints. There seemed to be no end to their tales of woe. With Sheikh Sahib's assuming charge as Chief Minister, a new phase of prosperity was unleashed for the people, however ambitions and expectations had also soared sky high. Everyone was naturally expecting his children to get government employment, and even asked for admission of their children to professional courses in medicine and engineering. Their demands had no relevance to the marks obtained by the children in qualifying examinations. These people would seek plots of land, jobs, or admission in professional colleges. Rashid Sahib and I collected hundreds of

applications, and as we were returning back home in our car there was a load of these applications lying in the car.

“What’re you going to do with these applications? How many people’s demands can be met?” I asked Sheikh Rashid pointing to the pile of papers nearby.

“This has become a routine; presentation of these applications, I mean. It is a kind of second habit with the people to write in their complaints and demands. And these are ever available to be handed over to anyone who passes this way”, explained Sheikh Rashid to me.

“You mean the applications are ever ready for presentation?”, I enquired.

“Whoever passes this way is given an application. Nobody has the Aladdin’s lamp for sorting out all the problems in a matter of days”, Mr. Rashid explained.

“Some complaints and demands are indeed quite justified and reasonable. For example, this need for proper drainage, and providing a higher secondary school in the area”, I said.

“I shall plead their case vehemently, I’m not sure though that all my pleading will be helpful”, said Rashid.

“Why don’t you personally explain all this to Sheikh Sahib?”

“I’ve told him many times. But the cronies who surround him will not let him attend to these vital matters”, he expressed his opinion with anxiety and concern.

Soon thereafter, I proceeded to Jammu to attend a meeting of the J & K State Social Welfare Advisory Board. There I had to accompany Mrs. Mekhla Jha on a tour of certain areas. Together we inspected some centres for development of local handicrafts, and centres for disabled children in the Jammu region.

This was also the time when the National Conference led State Government had come under severe criticism by the people. They said there was a menace of growing corruption, nepotism, favouritism. Many irregularities were being committed by the government. Wherever I went in Jammu, this was the topic of conversation. It was obvious to me then that such disaffection against the government had been caused by the sustained propaganda carried

out by the Congress(I) against the National Conference in order to malign it politically. After the victory of the Congress(I) at the Centre, and formation of its government, this was one of the way they attempted to destabilize the government of Jammu and Kashmir.

I had occasion to meet Abdul Rashid Shaheen, Minister for Industries at Jammu. It was apparent to me from the conversation he had with me that even he was drawn into the whirlpool of group politics in the National Conference. From his talk it was evident that he was personally devoted and loyal to Sheikh Sahib. I talked to him at length and said:

“Our government is being defamed openly. Accusations of corruption are open and vehement.”

Shaheen was quite upset by my remarks and he retorted back saying, “I know who is responsible for all this. We have no lack of enemies. This is the easiest way to defame us.”

“But people won’t say such things without any reason”, I observed.

“Oh! I see. So you too believe all this to be true?” queried Shaheen, his face serious.

“How can I believe anything if I haven’t seen any wrong. I don’t take any notice of such unfounded allegations”, I replied.

Shaheen was visibly happy to hear my remarks.

Thereafter I proceeded from Jammu to Delhi. There I met Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Member of Parliament at his official residence at 90, Shahjahan Road. I was accompanied by my husband. Dr. Farooq was very courteous. He made us comfortable and called for tea. Then he said:

“I have to go to the Embassy of Iraq to meet a dignitary there. I shall be back shortly. Please wait for me here.”

We waited for him in the lawn of his residence. Sometime later he came back and I asked: “Did you meet the concerned person?”

“No, not the one I had to meet. I met someone else. Shortly I have to see him again.”

Then I talked to him about the political situation in the state. I told him about the rumours of rampant corruption in the state. As

he heard me awhile he said:

"People don't tell a lie. All the ministers are corrupt. Unless all this is stopped, nothing is going to change."

"There's lot of factional politics in the party as well," I told him.

"I know all that. I am fully aware of who's doing what", Farooq said.

"People are even saying that party workers are being used. It hardly matters what kind of work one is doing for the party. In my presence, some workers have said that nothing is accomplished without special recommendations", I informed Dr. Farooq.

"They're right. It isn't England. Assignments and promotions are not necessarily given on the basis of ability or merit!", he observed.

I was quite sad to hear these remarks and asked ruefully:

"Who's going to change this system then?"

"We, of course", he retorted emphatically. His reply gave solace to my heart.

As I returned to Srinagar I came to know that the University students had created turmoil in Srinagar on some pretext. The followers of Jamat-i-Islami were behind these happenings. Simultaneously, there was also a sudden spate in the propaganda of Muslim fundamentalist organizations in the valley. Framed pictures of Ayatullah Khoemeni of Iran were now decorating many homes in towns and villages alike. At the same time, these organizations were doing lot of work in the university, schools and colleges to recruit students in the cause of their activities.

Sheikh Sahib flew from Jammu to Srinagar and took stock of the situation of law and order. The students turmoil was stopped short of further mischief and miscreants were arrested and sent outside the state.

The Prime Minister of Vietnam paid a visit to Srinagar the very next day. Sheikh Sahib and some of his colleagues gave a rousing welcome to him on his arrival in Srinagar. He was also taken on local visits in the valley. In view of the apprehensions of mischief by the fundamentalist organisations, lot of security measures had been taken on this occasion. Many miscreants had

been arrested earlier and there was no untoward law and order problem.

During the summer the state government began work on a number of development projects in the valley. Lot of money came into circulation. Centres for handicrafts were opened in large numbers to train young boys and girls in such arts as embroidery, crewel work, and carpet weaving. It was emphasized that the youth should be trained to earn their livelihood and become self-sufficient.

Meetings of the District Development Board which were attended by Ministers of the Cabinet as well, were held in every district in order to expedite work on various projects for rapid progress of the area. The members of the Legislative Assembly Party functionaries in the area were also invited to these meetings. I was also a participant in these. Administrative approval and allotment of funds for projects in the area were sanctioned by these Boards. Therefore, the local M.L.A. and other political party members were keen to have a good deal of say in decision making in order to enhance their political clout with the people. Professionals and bureaucrats of the State Government were present in these board meetings in order to answer members' queries as well as assist in taking final administrative decisions in respect of projects. This unique arrangement for expeditious decision making was initiated by Sheikh Abdullah himself in order to cut red tape. At that time this kind of procedure was not followed in any other state of the country.

Prominent workers and office bearers of the party were invited to a luncheon meeting at Mujahid Manzil. Members of Sheikh Sahib's Cabinet and party functionaries from the districts were also invited. The political situation in the state and other routine affairs were discussed. The meeting was over, but we were still seated. In the meanwhile G.M. Chintsaz brought in a tray of apples and distributed them amongst us. I took an apple which I kept on the floor near my purse. Mr. G.M. Bhat M.L.A., also lovingly known as Ghulam Mohd. Reda, was seated between me and Sheikh Sahib. While my attention was elsewhere, Sheikh

Sahib asked Bhat Sahib to remove and hide the apple given to me. I was unmindful while he did so. When I discovered later that my apple was gone, I looked around to find it. Everyone knew that the apple had been taken by Sheikh Sahib himself. Mr. Mohan Kishan Tikku, Cabinet Minister, said with a smile:

“Didn’t you get an apple to eat?”

I understood by now whose practical joke it was, and I said, “Mine was the best apple. That’s what all of you envied. You are wondering how I got the best apple while you have the bad ones.”

“Listen to her arguments. She never fumbles for words”, Sheikh Sahib said with a smile.

“She should have been a lawyer”, said Mr. Bhat.

“If not an advocate, she’s after all the daughter of an advocate”, said Sheikh Sahib.

Meetings at Mujahid Manzil would not always end on such jovial note. The problems were many and often ticklish. One day soon after a meeting, we gathered in Sheikh Sahib’s room for an informal exchange of views. As usual, he enquired from us about our respective jurisdictions. Referring to workers of the Jamat-i-Islami, he also enquired, “Are they subdued and restrained in their activities?”

Thereupon a worker replied, “They’re making lot of fun at our cost over the remarks of Zia-ul-Haq.”

“What remarks?” asked Sheikh Sahib.

“That the Kashmiris are ‘brahmazadas’!” (sons of Brahmins), said Sheikh Rashid.

“When did he say so?” asked Sheikh Sahib with a surprise.

“He said it on the radio. It was around the same time that Bhutto was hanged,” replied Mohi-ud-din Shawl.

“The followers of the Jamat are pointing accusing fingers towards us”, said another worker.

“This is being deliberately done in order to arouse our passions”, said Abdul Ahad Vakil.

“What is there to get angry about? Who are accusing you? What is their own status? What’s there to hide? We are ‘brahman-zades’ and truth cannot be ignored” said Sheikh Sahib with a smile.

As he uttered these words everybody smiled and agreed with him. Even as we moved out of the hall, people were talking over the matter and reinforcing these remarks with their own personal knowledge and examples from their respective family trees.

Mr. G.M. Badarwahi, a member of Sheikh Abdullah's Cabinet, was hurt on account of the fact that while Mr. D.D. Thakur and some others held full cabinet level positions, he was only a minister of state, and that too under Mr. D.D. Thakur. He felt that it was *infra dig* for him to hold this lower rank of minister particularly in view of the personal sacrifices he made earlier while struggling shoulder to shoulder with Beg Sahib and Sheikh Sahib. Thakur Sahib was a newcomer to the party and brought from outside. This hurt Badarwahi very much. This was evident from what he told me while he poured his heart out during one of our meetings at party headquarters.

"I have sacrificed a lot for the party's sake. And look what I have got!"

"Why? You're a minister. What more do you expect?" I said trying to pacify him.

"Do you know, what people are saying? I am ashamed to face my own people," he said with anger. His face was flushed.

"But tell me. What exactly do you expect?", I asked in order to get at the bottom of things.

"Is this justice? A person who has sacrificed so much for the organisation all these years is being so disgraced. Those who were not known, not even recognized, who joined the organization yesterday, have been placed over our heads", he was saying aloud in anger. I could sense clearly to whom he alluded. I was also aware of the fact that I, too, had been with the organisation for only about six years. In order to pacify him, I said:

"I hope you're not including me as well amongst such people." I smiled while saying so.

"No— No— not at all! God is witness! Yours is a different situation altogether. Please, don't misunderstand me", replied Badarwahi with his temper somewhat cooled.

"Let me ask you just one question. Against whom do you have

a complaint?"

"Do I need to spell it out?" Badarwahi was by now fully calmed down.

"Forget about the past. Tell me, shall I talk the matter over to Sheikh Sahib?" He was happy to hear this from me and said:

"Yes, please do. But on your own behalf. He shouldn't know that we have exchanged notes on the issue."

"I do understand", agreeing with him, I said. As I was getting up to leave, he informed me:

"Khemlataji, recently there was talk of nominating you to the assembly. Indeed, Sheikh Sahib had raised the issue himself."

"What happened then?" I asked with lot of curiosity and interest.

"Many members said that since your husband is already the Principal of the Engineering College, it would make people feel very bad, if you were also made a member of the assembly", Badarwahi informed me .

"May I know please, who were those members?", I asked raising my eyebrows.

"It was Thakur Sahib. Beg Sahib also said something to that effect. And of course, I too thought that way. You would unnecessarily be the victim of people's envy", Badarwahi told me giving me to understand that he was my well-wisher.

I felt like telling him that people would get jealous only if both my husband and I held official positions. Outwardly, however, I kept my cool and didn't express what I felt. I did feel sad though about the way people go about matters. They are more interested in their own selfish gains and losses.

Sometime later, Badarwahi met me again and reminded me about my promised meeting with Sheikh Sahib.

I had not met Sheikh Sahib then. But I promised him that I would meet him soon.

As I entered the gate of Sheikh Sahib's residence, I found him strolling in the lawns inspecting plants and flowers. He was pleased to see me, and asked me to sit.

Besides the two of us there was a gardener and D.K. Razdan, Director of Floriculture. Sheikh Sahib moved towards me and sat

in the chair opposite mine. I wanted to speak to him about Badarwahi before anyone else came in and make my task more difficult. Before I could say anything, he asked "How come, you have dropped in so soon today? Any particular errand?"

"Papa! I have a special request. I have come to put in a word in favour of Badarwahi Sahib", I said in one breath.

"A word for Badarwahi?", he asked with an angry surprise. His face was contorted in anger. He looked straight into my eyes, as if I had said something objectionable. Without hearing me any further he went on:

"Do you know how he has dealt with me? He's stabbed me; and that too in my back!"

He was in a rage, and he went on:

"I've made him. I gave him prestige and honour. His respect in society was enhanced by me. And this is how he pays me back?"

"But, sir, can't you forgive him?" I put in mildly.

"I don't want to forgive him. Don't they have any duties towards me? I had great expectations from him. That hope too is finished." There was sadness and pain pouring forth with his words.

"He is very repentant and ashamed of his mistakes." As I said so, Sheikh Sahib was somewhat quietened. Encouraged, I went on to say:

"Khema baran ko chahiye, chhotan ko utpat" (great people should pardon, while the small ones may commit faults).

"What does that mean?" he asked with a broad smile on his face.

I explained the meaning of the couplet to Sheikh Sahib. "Since when did you begin dabbling in poetry?"

By now Sheikh Sahib had spent his anger.

"This isn't my poem. I read this in some book," I replied.

Sheikh Sahib had not forgiven those people who had ignored the party candidates at the behest of Beg Sahib. And G.M. Badarwahi was somehow considered part of Beg's group. I did, however, put in a word in his favour.

"Badarwahi has sacrificed a lot. He should be given a front ranking position."

"Does he want to?" he asked.

"All of us feel it that way", I added immediately. I had the feeling that Sheikh Sahib understood that I was making this plea to him at the behest of Badarwahi himself.

"You should tell him to mind his own business. I do know what sacrifices everyone has made", Sheikh Sahib told me. Next time, I met Badarwahi, I gave him a full account of this conversation I had with Sheikh Sahib.

The political opponents of the government were never idle. Instigation of college and university students was a common feature of their activities. Sometimes they would use the Islamic card and at others bring in the problems of corruption and nepotism which became the topic of conversation in every household. Students of the university and the engineering college caused disturbances. Some miscreants attempted to set on fire the Zaina Kadal bridge in the heart of the town. All this happened while communal disturbances erupted in Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh. The situation was tense but thanks to the political stature of Sheikh Sahib, his opponents couldn't have their way. The state government was able to prevent any disturbances in the state. Personally, Sheikh Abdullah addressed school and college teachers and principals and explained the secular foundations of the country's constitution. He made it clear that there was no room for any religious fundamentalism interfering in matters of government or educational institutions. He also emphasized the role of teachers in bringing about good academic atmosphere and eradicate from the roots the rampant indiscipline in educational institutions.

Although there was no commonality in the policies and programmes of the Jamat-i-Islami, Awami Action Committee, and the Congress(I), nor were there any emotional affinities, yet the Congress(I) in J & K was plodding the other two groups to create problems for the N.C. Government by agitation. They were united in only achieving one goal viz. maligning the person of Sheikh Sahib and his government. It did not matter to the Congress(I) however, that in the process of such an unprincipled stand they might totally sacrifice the basic values and principles of their own party.

Sheikh Abdullah did not take the challenge lying down. He addressed a largely attended public meeting at Mujahid Manzil, where every inch of space was crowded with people. After many people addressed the gathering, Sheikh Sahib rose to speak. There was thunder in his voice as he warmed up to spit fire against his opponents. He referred to the machinations of those people who were trying at all costs to disturb the peace in the valley. Without naming any parties or individuals, he lashed out at them and their nefarious designs. With his forceful speech ringing in their minds and hearts, the party workers were happy and enthused as they left the premises with a renewed vigour.

After the meeting was over I went into G.M. Shah's room accompanied by Hissam-ud-din Bandey and Abdul Ahad Vakil. Some other workers were already seated there seeking favours or redressal of grievances.

"Please ask the Chief Engineer to favour me with the tender", one was pleading.

"Tell the Education Commissioner to promote my son-in-law" was another request. "His case has been already processed", another added in support.

There was no end to such requests for favouring relations on one pretext or the other no matter how right or wrong that might be. In order to justify such requests, workers would always put forward the plea of having made sacrifices in the past for which they were seeking to reap some reward now. Such quid pro quo was not regarded as something wrong. During such business-like talks it was not uncommon to discuss personal matters.

"How is Khadiji?" enquired Bandey Sahib from G.M. Shah.

"Was she in a critical condition yesterday" enquired Abdul Ahad Vakil.

"Her condition is still critical. God knows, how much time she has yet to live", replied Shah Sahib.

"Who's Khadiji? Is she related to you?" I enquired. I hadn't heard that name before, and there was obvious curiosity in my expression.

"She's the Ayah of Khalidaji. She has been with them from her childhood", said Bandey.

"What's it that you're saying? Since when did she become Khalidaji's ayah?", asked Shah, cutting Bandey short probably.

"That's what we believed," Bandey said casually, thinking that he might earn Shah's wrath if he said anything else.

"What do you know? And whatever you've heard is wrong. She was part of our household. I wasn't even married then. After our marriage, she began to visit the Sheikh family as well, because of Khalida. Let's keep the record straight."

With these remarks of Shah Sahib I understood that he had some kind of an inferiority feeling about his wife, Khalida. My belief in this was confirmed by what I saw on another occasion.

Shah Sahib had invited the daughter of late Ali Yavar Jung to tea at his residence. I was also invited. Together with Shah Sahib and Khalidaji we were the only four people that day. Shah Sahib is very fond of gardening and flowers and looks after his garden himself. He and Khalidaji had told me so on earlier occasions.

Ms. Jung was now being shown around the garden and there was a lot of appreciation of the lovely roses grown in the garden.

"You've excellent varieties of roses in your garden", said Ms. Jung.

"It's all Shah Sahib's contribution. He tends the garden. I do these vegetables here. That's my department" said Khalida pointing towards the vegetable patch.

"Everything is neatly laid out here", I said.

"Your residence and your garden are beautiful, Shah Sahib", said Ms. Jung to him. He was standing nearby.

"This isn't my house! It belongs to Khalida. Of course, I look after the garden", he replied inadvertently revealing his mind.

"This is our house. After we're gone, it will be our children's", said Khalida trying to mitigate her husband's faux pass. She gave him an oblique look.

I realized what was going on in their minds. Ms. Jung also became aware of how Shah Sahib felt. And I was fully convinced of this later when I saw that when we sat to have tea, she addressed all her words to Shah Sahib with obvious self-consciousness. I spent the evening trying to maintain a natural, normal conversation.

Kashmiri Pandits commonly perform a religious function in their homes which is called "Mekhla" or "Yagopavit". A "yagna" (prayers before a sacred fire) is performed and male children in the family are baptized into the fold of the twice-born brahmins. This ceremony was being performed in our home for our children. In south India this ceremony is also known as "Upanyanam".

I had invited L.K. Jha, the then Governor of J & K, to participate in the function along with his wife Madam Jha. After both of them offered the traditional "Ahuti" (offering) to the sacred fire, there was some talk about the customs of the people in the country. Mrs. Jha observed:

"In our parts this ceremony is performed with lot of faith. And children are dressed up, in the attire of the gurukul forest with saffron colored clothes and a special cap. But times have changed now."

"We call this ceremony 'mekhla' like your name. We don't really know the meaning of it all", I said.

"The sacred thread that is wrapped round the waist is called 'Mekhla' explained Mr. Jha.

Then there was talk about the caste system and the sub-division of sects and creeds amongst the brahmins based on their "Gotras" (clan denominations) and all that. It transpired that Mr. Jha was himself a Saraswat brahmin and Mrs. Jha a Vaishnav.

"Being a Saraswat brahmin, you're quite close to us", I said in a lighter vein.

"Even otherwise we're sitting quite near you", replied Mr. Jha pointing to his chair.

Everyone around had a hearty laughter over the remark.

A few months later at the time of my son's marriage we had invited L.K. Jha, Mrs. Jha, Sheikh Abdullah, Begum Abdullah and Dr. Farooq Abdullah for a reception. There were many other party colleagues also invited on the occasion. Among the invitees there were a few Iranian student friends of our children. Sitting by the side of Sheikh Abdullah and Begum Sahib was Mr. Hakim Habib Ullah, who was then chairman of the Legislative Council of the state. As he saw the Irani students, he said to them:

"Which book provides instructions to Muslims for killing

Muslims or getting them killed?"

"Sir, we don't know this. We're perplexed by what's happening", replied Miss Shahnaz, one of the Iranian students.

"Is it desirable to exterminate engineers, doctors and intellectuals in this manner?", asked Habib Ullah of these students, as if they were the culprits.

"Sir, that's why we have taken refuge here with you. There's no place for people like us in that country", said other students in unison.

"Hayal's brother-in-law, who was a doctor in a major hospital in Iran, has been killed," said another pointing towards Hayal.

"Even young school boys were dragged out and murdered", Shahnaz was recounting with tears rolling down her eyes.

"Do you get news from your homes?" asked Sheikh Sahib with empathy.

"No sir, there is no mail. We get no news either. I don't know if my sister is alive or not. Nor do I know if her children are still alive", added Hayal with eyes full of tears.

"Who told you about your brother-in-law?", enquired Hakim Habib Ullah.

"A few days ago a student came here. He had escaped from Iran. He gave us all these details", added Amer.

"It's impossible for us to return to Iran now", said all of them in one voice.

"Why don't you stay put here in that case", said Sheikh Sahib with a smile.

"Oh God! Peace be on us! Such destruction cannot be tolerated by anyone", added Begum Zafar Ali who was sitting nearby.

The news of the turmoil going on in Iran had created lot of consternation in the minds of the people in Kashmir. Is this what Islam preaches? Brother killing brother in the name of religion! There was conflict between Islamic nations in the name of setting up a better Islamic system. Humans, animals, birds were annihilated. Property was destroyed. Now, even land and sky are being blackened by explosions, bullets and gun fire. What kind of a demon has taken command of human minds? What would be the end of all this? In the midst of fear the people were thinking about

what was going on? Kashmiris are peace-loving people and they could not fathom the cause of the ongoing conflict and turmoil. In the context of what was happening in West Asia, I am reminded of the meeting that was organized by the Palestinian students in Srinagar, who were studying in Engineering, Medical, and other colleges. The meeting was held at Hotel Broadway in the town and many people were invited to the function. Dr. Farooq Abdullah was Chief Guest on the occasion. I was also invited along with my husband. As the Principal of the Engineering College, he was called upon to speak to the students. He dwelt upon their educational and professional matters including their future careers and discipline etc. Later Dr. Farooq was requested to deliver the presidential speech.

He made an enthusiastic and emotional speech. He thumped the podium with his clenched fist many times as he proclaimed:

“Why are you talking about the Islamic world? The whole Arab world is fighting amongst themselves. There is war going on. You’re ready to wreak bloody vengeance on each other, tear each other to shreds and fight over trivial issues. You dream of seeing an Islamic world coming together? How can that be? Firstly, you have got to forge unity. Only then can you achieve something.” All the students were listening to his speech with rapt attention.

“And nobody is going to help you from outside. You—you—and you— (he said aloud pointing his finger to a few students in the audience) have got to achieve that. In order to realize some objective, you got to first look within and make sure if it’s possible to achieve that goal. Yes, it’s all possible if we resolve to fight for our goals unitedly.”

Farooq’s speech was rather fiery and it was not for the first time that I heard him speak with such enthusiasm. On earlier occasions too, I had heard him speak like this. How much will his actions match his words, only time will tell! I thought. After the speech many Palestinian students asked Farooq, “Sir, why don’t you lead us in our struggle?”

“That too shall happen at the appropriate time”, Farooq replied in a jocular mood.

9th of March, 1981 was a nightmare day for the district town of Anantnag. There was rioting and vandalism on large scale. Wine shops were attacked by unruly mobs. The mobs, made of mostly young people, removed bottles of wine and smashed them. The shops were looted and the entire stock of bottled spirits destroyed. Then, the mobs marched in the streets, shouting slogans against India and clamoured to usher in Nizam-e-Mustafa. Their shouts rent the skies.

The police authorities and the Deputy Commissioner of the district did not attach much importance to these incidents, and rather ignored them on the presumption that this was merely a playful act of the youth. No pressure was put on the vandals. But the situation got worse instead, and within three days the entire stock of wine shops was looted and damaged in the town. The authorities then swung into action and arrested some people in connection with the incidents.

There was the hand of many political parties in these incidents, foremost amongst these being the Jamat-i-Islami and other parties with similar outlook namely the Mahaz-i-Azadi, the Peoples League, and Kashmir Liberation Front etc. The rank and file of Jamat-i-Islami were keen on wreaking vengeance as they were burning with a rage to do so and in their fury wanted to burn the state of Jammu and Kashmir to ashes. The events of arson and rioting against the adherents of the Jamat-i-Islami by the workers of the National Conference and the Congress(I) which followed soon after the hanging of Bhutto in Pakistan and in which they burnt the homes of Jamat workers to ashes were still fresh in their memory.

Firstly, they slowly penetrated into the ranks of the National Conference and the Congress(I) and began to carve out a niche for themselves in their outfits. They knew that making inroads into their head and hearts would be far more effective than their efforts of propaganda from outside. This was the first step in their strategy.

Most of the wine shops looted in Anantnag were owned by people belonging to the minority group of Hindu Kashmiris. Destroying these shops would result in multiple benefits. Firstly,

the Hindus would be frightened and secondly Sheikh Abdullah's image as Chief Minister would be tarnished and his name maligned in the country. Also, the Jamat bosses were convinced that people did not approve of drinking alcohol and therefore these gimmicks provided them a sharp weapon and an effective tool to win over people.

People with leanings towards the Jamat philosophy had also been recruited into the administration and the police force. And when the youngsters first struck against the wine shops, the police and administration surreptitiously turned a blind eye to the events.

This boosted the morale of Jamat workers.

The main target of attack of the Jamat-i-Islami were those political parties which preached secularism, socialism and democracy. These included, among others, the Congress(I), the National Conference and the Communist Party of India. Jamat-i-Islami preached the single goal of Nizam-e-Mustafa, which had no place for the ideals of democracy or secularism.

At the National Conference headquarters at Mujahid Manzil, there was not much political reaction to the events in Anantnag. Naively, people were rather happy that a social evil like alcoholism was being nipped in the bud.

At a Zonal meeting of the party held in Sonwar, on the outskirts of Srinagar, there was quite a bit of discussion on the evils of consuming alcohol.

"If the young people have taken these measures against liquor, we should be happy", said a worker in that meeting.

"Many homes have been ruined because of the menace of drinking. The government has to stop it", said another.

"There's no doubt that drinking and alcoholism can be a menace. But it's not correct to take law into one's own hands. This is likely to assume serious proportions later, if ignored at this juncture," I told the workers gathered there.

"Islam forbids consumption of alcohol. And people have become dangerously addicted here", said another worker in response.

"Well, this time the shops have been forcibly closed. Gradually, people will give up drinking by themselves", added Abdul

Samad Teli, M.L.A.

From these conversations, I was convinced that, by and large, the people were happy over the events that took place in Anantnag. However, I was personally quite disheartened by these trends in the public mood.

All the workers assembled in this large meeting room were incessantly smoking from a common "hukkah" (hubble-bubble). While one was gurgling and inhaling smoke from the hukkah, another would put out his hand in order to have his turn by holding the smoke pipe. And turn by turn, nearly fifty men were thus enjoying their puffs of tobacco smoke. Although the room was large, it was filled with the smoke of tobacco to such an extent that many were coughing, but none of them was prepared to give up smoking or even stop it for a while.

I was feeling quite outraged watching this scene. What kind of culture is ours? This question was haunting me.

When many of the senior party men had made their eloquent speeches about current events, and talked mostly on discipline and evils of alcohol, it was my turn to address the workers. I made a pointed reference to the people in the audience, and said:

"I listened to your speeches with attention and interest. You have attacked the evils of drinking alcohol. Is it possible to bring about self-discipline by closing shops, breaking bottles of wine and vandalism? Self-discipline needs real education. Some misguided young people forced closure of a few shops; I don't consider that a good thing at all. Those who want to drink, will find their drink somehow, even if all shops are closed. Unless we discipline ourselves from within, how is it possible for such actions to achieve anything?

"All of you have been in this meeting for an hour or more. Never once did you give any respite to this "hubble-bubble". I have observed you closely all this time, but didn't find the "hukkah" at rest for even a single minute. This apparatus has been moving around from one corner of the room to the other, over and over again, as if it is some kind of a golden sparrow. The room is choking with awful smoke. All of you are coughing. But nobody is concerned, nobody feels that you might give the hukkah some

rest. Think for a moment, please. If someone comes along, breaks your "hukkah", closes all tobacco shops, and showers stones on you, will that be enough to rid you of this bad habit for ever? Unless discipline and control comes from deep down, there will be no change in our society."

When I finished speaking, I noticed that the "hukkah" was quietly whisked away into one corner of the room. The windows of the room were opened, and everyone looked a little embarrassed. When the meeting was over Abdul Samad Teli, M.L.A., smilingly said to me:

"You taught us a good lesson today!"

The events in Anantnag became the butt of severe criticism against Sheikh Sahib and his government in the national press and led to the creation of tension between the Central and the State Government. Signs of such tension became evident in many ways. The Congress(I) in J & K was now in full-fledged opposition and these developments provided the party with a handy tool and a rare opportunity to malign the Sheikh government.

The Awami Action Committee, Jamat-i-Islami and other reactionary organizations were already opponents and critics of Sheikh Abdullah's government. In the present situation all of them became united in the single point programme of opposing and destabilizing his government. The National Conference workers were alarmed. There were rumours galore and the workers thought that events like those of 1953 may be repeated and the Sheikh dislodged from power.

Sheikh Sahib had become used to blowing hot and cold in his public addresses. He knew too well that Kashmiris had their "honour and self-respect." They could lay down their lives, maintaining these attributes. He didn't allow any compromises with the "dignity and honour" of the people of Kashmir. That was his life's mission.

I recollect an incident when Dr. Farooq Abdullah was enthusiastically addressing a jam-packed gathering in Mujahid Manzil. He vehemently and openly criticized the government at the Centre. He went to the extent of proclaiming that we would smash

the Central Government. People welcomed his speech with loud applause. But soon thereafter, Sheikh Abdullah spoke and it was as if he sprinkled ice cold water over Farooq's hot words. He referred to his son's speech merely as the outburst of an emotional youngman and ignored as such. The media also did not pay much heed to Farooq's speech.

The Congress(I) organized a largely attended public meeting on May day. Vasant Sathe, a Central cabinet minister was present on the occasion. The speakers at the meeting including the Central Minister publicly criticized the government led by Sheikh Abdullah. Allegations of corruption, nepotism and maladministration were made and highlighted.

Sheikh Abdullah rebutted these allegations immediately thereafter at a rally organized by the N.C. at Iqbal Park in Srinagar. He strongly criticised the Congress(I) and referred to the workers of the party as "worms of the cesspool". Thereby he sought to settle scores with his opponents paying them back in their own coin. People were happy, but the National Conference leadership was not prepared to lose its power at any cost. So this much was considered sufficient to counter the propaganda of the opposition parties. The Congress(I) was used as a scapegoat in the process.

Attempts were made by the opposition to create student unrest in the Regional Engineering College, Srinagar. The students wing of Jamat-i-Islami namely the Jamat-i-Tulba and supporters of the Awami Action Committee were in the forefront of activities in order not to lose any opportunity to achieve their only goal of removing the National Conference from power and authority. Student unrest within the colleges was also supported from outside by other political outfits, with the result that every now and then there were problems of law and order in various towns. Given the towering stature of Sheikh Abdullah, however, no other leader could hold it against him for long. In spite of the fact, that the use of religion in politics provided a razor sharp weapon to the opponents, all their machinations and stratagems were routed by the National Conference.

The disturbances and turmoil were undoubtedly subdued, but the opponents' propaganda against Sheikh Sahib and his family,

as well as against the National Conference continued unabated.

Around this time the Iraqi Minister for Religious Affairs, Noorie Faizal Alshahni visited Srinagar as leader of a goodwill delegation from his country. The purpose of this visit by the Iraqi delegation was to inform the public opinion in the country about the Iran-Iraq conflict and counter the propaganda by Iran in this connection. The members of the delegation sought to mobilize opinion of the people of the state in its favour. The delegation had not come empty-handed. Lot of money was being given out by them as gifts and donations for religious institutions to enable them to carry out their propaganda campaigns.

The College of Oriental Studies being run by the Islamia Trust was renamed after the Iraqi president Saddam Hussain. The Islamia Trust was then presided over by Maulvi Mohammad Farooq. The college received a substantial grant. As a result of these donations, prayers were offered in many private schools and colleges as well as mosques for the victory of the Iraqi forces against Iran. As if this was not enough, even a segment of small newspaper owners was tackled and lot of money was passed on to them for propaganda work. There was suddenly a spate of one-page Urdu dailies in the market, with new high sounding names. This was a convenient new ploy used by many to encash their share from the bonanza.

Iran, on the other hand, could not keep away long. The Iraqi propaganda had to be countered squarely. So Iran joined the fray with equal zeal. The Cultural Attache of the Embassy of Iran in India, Ali Raza Ramani, paid a visit to Srinagar. He also met many leaders of political parties and media persons, and also emptied his coffers to the extent possible, thereby seeking to condemn with utmost vehemence Iraqi policies and propaganda.

To start with people in Kashmir got confused and divided over the Iran-Iraq war. The segment of population following the Shia creed were naturally inclined towards the fundamentalist approach of Iran, and those of the Sunni creed had their sympathies with the people of Iraq. But gradually with a greater inflow of funds from the Iranian sources, the people began to sing more praises for the Iranian viewpoint. There was a growth of new

centres and schools of Islamic studies in the valley at the same time.

One day we had organized a public meeting of the party at Meesha Sahib, Rainawari in the old parts of Srinagar. Lots of people were present at this meeting besides party workers and leaders. On this occasion, I heard, for the first time, my party workers discuss the Iran-Iraq war in their public speeches. Indeed, the workers were vying with each other to emphasize the basic teachings of Islam. People, however, sought to ignore the conflict between Iran and Iraq, and merely treat it as something that concerned those countries only. For the people of Kashmir both countries were equally benefactors of Islam. There is a saying common in Kashmir: "Aisus Koota Choyo ti Aahi Patha droyo" ("From sweet morsels arise sweeter praises") which appropriately explained this change in people's attitudes.

The government was caught in the throes of tension in Centre-State relations. On the other front there was conflict within the National Conference between the groups loyal to Sheikh Sahib and Beg Sahib and other opposition groups. They were ever ready to exploit these situations every now and then. The Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences was one such newly established institution which became the focal point of their criticism. Such developmental activity was being highlighted by the opponents as wasteful expenditure on non-productive works. Even several schemes which had been taken up for the benefit of weaker sections of society and women under the social welfare programme were the butt of opposition's criticism. A scenario of discontent was being deliberately worked up assiduously.

Chapter 12

Farooq Appointed President of N.C.

IN August 1981, at the time of the birth of my granddaughter, Liebee, I had to be at Jamshedpur for about six weeks. Although Dr. Farooq Abdullah had been earlier elected as President of the National Conference to succeed his father, there was a huge procession specially organized to announce this decision publicly. I was not personally witness to this rally. But when I returned to Srinagar, everyone I met told me that the procession was unprecedented and never before was such a grand procession witnessed. The whole population of Srinagar city and adjoining areas were out on the streets that day. The rows and columns of people on the roads were happy and hilarious. They were happy that their beloved leader had now offered them his son to serve them in future, to lead and guide them, and to help them build and develop the new Kashmir in the new age.

Dr. Farooq was in the procession seated on a specially decorated vehicle and his proud parents, Sheikh Abdullah, Begum Abdullah, other members of the family and H.N. Bahuguna, president of the Lok Dal (S) showered basketfuls of rose petals and flowers on Dr. Farooq and the crowds from the verandah of hotel Lalarookh in the famous Lal Chowk area of the city.

The mouths of the opposition were gagged as it were. This sea of humanity made it abundantly clear and proclaimed loudly in Srinagar and the whole valley, who the leader really was.

Not only this, even in the whole country at large it became abundantly clear that Sheikh Abdullah was and continued to be the unchallenged leader of the people of Kashmir.

During his own lifetime the people of Kashmir had shown

Sheikh Abdullah how much they loved him ever more than anybody else. They gladly accepted Dr. Farooq as leader in order to show their gratitude to the Sheikh, and were expressing themselves happily through singing and dancing.

After these developments all those in Delhi who wanted to dislodge Sheikh Abdullah from the office of Chief Minister, were silenced. Seeing the pulse of the people and sensitivity of the situation these people shelved their dreams about the toppling game. Many opponents of the Sheikh within the valley were also taken aback and for the time being, silenced by the events. They were otherwise keen to see him removed as a hurdle in their path to power. No doubt, they had succeeded in making a dent in the public mind against Sheikh Abdullah, but the people's love for him and his own stature had ensured that his opponents' utterances were quite trivial. The criticism by the opposition, therefore, went unheeded by the people at large.

When I returned from Jamshedpur I took a large cake for presentation to Sheikh Sahib at his residence. My husband and my son were with me. Besides Sheikh Sahib and Begum Abdullah there was no one around in their room.

As we took our seats Sheikh Sahib asked:

"When did you come back? Why the cake?"

"Our son had a daughter", I said.

"Ah! you have a granddaughter", added Begum Abdullah.

"To share our happiness, we got this cake for you", said my husband.

"Grandchildren are far more lovable than one's children, that you'll realize soon", Begum Sahiba said.

While our conversation was going on, we heard some slogan shouting at a distance from outside. Begum Sahiba was somewhat alarmed and asked her servant:

"Find out what they are shouting about."

Sheikh Sahib cut short her conversation in the midst and said:

"They're saying, you eat this cake!" And we had a hearty laugh as he said so. Thereafter the Begum said to my son, "Please ask him to get plates." As we got down to eating some cake, our conversation began again.

"What name have you given to the new-born child?" asked Begum Sahiba.

"Liebee Nitya."

"Liebee? What's that name?"

"Dear, lovely. It's a German word."

"You seem to be in love with Germany."

"I sincerely wish that our country also becomes as prosperous as the western countries. There's enough to eat and wear, and nobody suffers from wants", I replied.

"Who doesn't want that?" added Begum Abdullah. Sheikh Sahib was talking to my husband and enquiring about college affairs.

The Regional Engineering College students had organized a water sports meet as a part of their annual day functions.

Mr. D.D. Thakur, Finance and Education Minister in Sheikh's government, had been invited as the Chief Guest on the occasion. There was a water polo match by the students and I was also invited to witness the game. The game was organized in the Nigeen Lake and all the guests were seated on the projecting deck of the club house on the banks of the lake. I was seated beside Thakur Sahib and naturally we got talking about the current political developments. Thakur Sahib was quite upset and sorry over the expulsion of Mirza Afzal Beg from the National Conference. He was afraid that people loyal to Beg might come out in the open and create disturbances leading to an adverse law and order situation. He asked:

"Won't this action lead to disruption of the party, dividing it into two?"

"I don't think anything substantial that might endanger the party will happen", I replied emphatically.

"How come you are so sure, that Beg Sahib's supporters will sit quiet and idle?"

"Because I know everyone in the party so well. I know their minds. Not that people are not loyal and supporting to Beg Sahib. But while the Sheikh is around, nobody dare openly express his loyalty to Beg. And what is now left with Beg Sahib anyway? Why should people follow him?" I clarified.

I don't know if Thakur Sahib believed my words then or not. But I was proved absolutely right when Beg Sahib was indeed left alone with only a couple of loyalists to pursue his Inqalabi National Conference path. Soon after his expulsion from the party, I had heard many workers congratulating each other at the Mujahid Manzil and saying "Thank God! a major catastrophe has been averted."

After Beg's expulsion, Sheikh Sahib had given an inkling of his own mind about the events by addressing the party workers. He said: "If we focus our attention on rumours, then we shall not go far. Isn't it a fact that people were saying that I was taking every action only after consulting Beg Sahib. That everything that has happened at the political level is all due to Beg Sahib. People were made to believe that I was solely guided by and dependent on the intellect of Beg for my actions."

Kashmiris are endowed with fertile minds. Rumours are created and spread by them at great speed. And quite often these rumours turn into realities. Similarly it had become an accepted fact amongst people that Sheikh Abdullah was successful in his mission only because of Beg's intellectual brilliance. This is what Sheikh refuted in his speech, indirectly justifying Beg's ouster.

Talking of rumours, I am reminded of a personal anecdote. At a meeting of the Social Welfare Board, I met Begum Zafar Ali who asked me:

"Are you quite fine? How do you do?"

"Fine, absolutely. Why? . . . Why?"

"I mean, do you live in your own house?" she asked. This query seemed quite strange to me.

"Of course in my own house. Where else?" I replied.

"Please don't misunderstand me, Lataji. Actually someone had conveyed to me that you are estranged from your husband. People seem to enjoy spreading rumours."

"Who told you so? I have a granddaughter", I informed her.

"Congrats! Indeed, people do need some gossip for entertainment. May God keep you well!"

I heard similar remarks later on a few other occasions. I was surprised as well as sad. I wondered why people take pleasure in

concocting and spreading gossip.

Mr. Dharamvir Singh Oberoi called on me at my residence. He was President of the Srinagar Municipal Council. I could sense the purpose of his visit.

As I mentioned earlier, there were two groups in the National Conference. One loyal to Beg and another to Sheikh. After the expulsion of Beg Sahib, there were still two more camps and as yet no peace within the party. The question was about the filling of the position falling vacant after the exit of Sheikh Sahib from the scene. Who would be the Chief Minister of the state? That was the question uppermost in everybody's mind. On one side there was Dr. Farooq Abdullah, son of Sheikh Sahib and on the other it was his son-in-law G.M. Shah. Indeed, G.M. Shah had a long and varied political experience. He had worked side by side with the Sheikh over long years outside the government. Besides, he had been a member of his government for seven years. Nobody doubted Shah's ability. He had, however, one predominant handicap, namely, his inability to control his bad temper. This was also the sole reason why people in general would keep away from him.

In contrast, Farooq's experience in political work was negligible. Moreover, people were not even fully aware about Farooq's abilities. On the contrary, he had one great advantage. He was outgoing, broad minded, and jovial. Everyone praised his friendliness and courtesy in personal communication. Often Farooq would criticize in public the government headed by his own father, which convinced people that he would lead Kashmir towards greater progress. He was also brought up in modern ways and it appeared that his views were not conservative. Above all, it was well known that he had the blessings of his father. Under the umbrella of Sheikh Sahib no one else could, or even dared to attempt to raise his head against his wishes.

There is a long tradition in our country which still prevails: perpetuating one's family through the son. Even if the daughter is better, cleverer and intelligent, still it is felt that she is the honour and grace of another family, and she has nothing to do with the family of her birth. Precisely this mentality prevailed in the

Sheikh household. Sheikh Sahib desired from the depths of his heart that the tasks not yet accomplished by him should be undertaken after his death by his own son.

There were some important persons in the camp of G.M. Shah, who were also his close friends. These were among others, Mohi-ud-din Shah, G.N. Kochak, Hissam-ud-din Bandey and Abdul Ahad Wakil. In the Farooq camp the predominant persons were Sheikh Nazir, D.D. Thakur, Sheikh Rashid and Hakim Habib Ullah and many others who represented the younger generation of N.C. workers.

Dharamvir Singh Oberoi had, in fact, come to meet me and find out my views in the matter. We were seated in the lawns of my residence and discussed and assessed the political scenario while sipping tea. I had a good rapport with Oberoi as well as a good impression about him. He asked:

"Tell me, with whom do your loyalties lie? I mean are you with Shah Sahib or Farooq Sahib?"

"Up till now, I was with neither of them in that sense, I mean. For me the National Conference is one party, led by one leader. Now that you ask me, well, I think, Dr. Farooq is the one, out of the two, who will run the future", I replied at length.

"I've good personal relations with Shah Sahib. But, these are not matters for personal likes and dislikes. We've to see who'll represent us better politically", added Oberoi.

"Farooq is cosmopolitan. He's liberal in his views. His thinking is entirely different from Shah's", I said.

"Shah Sahib is a good person. But people are allergic to him because of his temperament", said Dharamvir.

"To be honest, I get quite vexed observing Shah Sahib rising to offer his prayers every now and then. We also pray, but we don't make an exhibition of it", I said.

"He believes that people will raise him to the skies for such acts. But they want something else", observed Dharamvir.

"Bringing religion into politics causes the downfall of people."

"Shall I convey to Dr. Farooq that you're on his side?" asked Dharamvir.

"Why do you have to emphasize the obvious?" I said.

"No, someone had conveyed that you are in Shah Sahib's favour. That's why I seek this confirmation from you."

"I'm everyone's well-wisher, but when it comes to a question of leadership, I'm in favour of Dr. Farooq."

With these parting thoughts in his mind, Dharamvir left happily.

Although, Dr. Farooq had taken over as President of the National Conference, the party workers, by and large, did not take him seriously. They would carry on as before and get the decisions made by various committees rubber-stamped by him later. Sometimes the decisions would be taken even without consulting him. Such state of affairs was within his knowledge, and his followers wanted that party decisions should be taken with his approval only.

With that kind of situation in his mind, it was natural for Dr. Farooq to address the workers in anger. In one meeting he shouted at the party workers and said:

"I'll square-up with all of you, one by one. Let the day arrive, and I'll show you the door. What do you think I am?"

Sheikh Nazir, General Secretary of the party and Mr. Mohi-uddin Shah former General Secretary were both present when this outburst came from Farooq.

Mr. B.K. Nehru had taken over as the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir in place of L.K. Jha. We had developed over the years, a bond of good personal relations with the Jha family. Personally I was delighted to work with Mrs. Jha, and now I wasn't quite sure how it would be working with Mrs. Nehru. What would be her style of functioning? I wasn't also sure as to what kind of personal rapport I would have with her. However, later on when I called on the Governor and Madam Nehru my apprehensions in this regard were totally unfounded.

Mr. Nehru and Mrs. Shobha Nehru turned out to be generous, courteous and deeply concerned with the well being and prosperity of the people of the state. Mrs. Nehru took up social welfare work under her charge with missionary zeal. She would examine each aspect and review work very critically. She visited every place personally to see the extent of work being done and the

progress made therein. Mrs. Nehru was deeply moved by the poverty and physical condition of the people. She wished people began to appreciate the need for hygiene and good health. She would minutely examine specimens of handicrafts like crewel work done at social welfare centres and suggest need for improvements in design or colour etc. The girls and the lady instructors at the centres were quite alert in their work because they were afraid of the criticism by Mrs. Nehru for poor workmanship.

Madam Nehru quite often mentioned to me that family planning was the only remedy for many of our ills. I had learnt that she had done considerable work in spreading the message of family planning in many parts of the country.

One day I called on the Governor Mr. Nehru at his official residence. Because of the failing health of Sheikh Sahib there was already talk about his successor being nominated. Among other things we talked about, this matter also came up. He asked me:

"Who is the next in command in your party after Sheikh Sahib?"

"As of today there are only two in the line, Dr. Farooq and Mr. G.M. Shah", I replied.

"Of the two who is backed by the people?", Nehru enquired.

"Dr. Farooq", I said.

"What kind of person is he? I mean how is his work as Party President?" asked Mr. Nehru.

This question rather baffled me. Till date Dr. Farooq had not really done any notable work as party president, and nobody even heeded him. All the same, I replied:

"He hasn't had any occasion yet to show his worth. But I'm confident that he will prove his qualities and merit at the appropriate time."

"What about G.M. Shah?"

"People aren't happy with him because of his temper", I said.

Thereafter, I further eulogised the qualities of Dr. Farooq, going to the extent of saying that he alone is capable of leading the state on the road to further progress. I got the feeling that even B.K. Nehru seemed to agree with my assessment. I also guessed

that some others within the party had already talked to him and apprised him of the goings-on within the National Conference at that time.

Within the National Conference there was a regular battle for supremacy between the two groups. And, generally it was also by now known who were the people loyal to either group. But it would be worthwhile mentioning here that there were some who were personally close and loyal to Beg Sahib and that they had not yet thrown their lot with any of the two groups. They were sitting on the fence and waiting to assess which side would emerge the stronger so that they could throw in their lot with him. These people were convinced that Shah was responsible for the ouster of Beg Sahib from the party. They nursed a deep grudge against him on this account. These people had also been victimized by Shah from time to time, but they were not able to express their views publicly yet.

In April 1982, the shooting incidents at the Al-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem, Israel, had its repercussions in the valley as well. People were angered and there was disorder and turmoil created by the mobs. The Jamat-i-Islami and Jamat-i-Tulba were the organisations in the forefront of these agitations. They organized a huge procession of students who set on fire a Christian church, United Nations Office and some shops belonging to Hindus. The shops were also looted. Automobiles were damaged with stone pelting and some were set on fire. The firetenders were prevented from putting out the fires.

The growing clout of the Jamat-i-Islami was hidden from no one. They were receiving huge sums from contacts abroad, and the fundamentalist upsurge in Iran was considerably influencing their ideas and work. Earlier in 1980 they were able to organize, the first ever, mass convention at the Idgah in Srinagar and more than ten thousand people attended the congregation. This was the first time that the tenets of Muslim fundamentalist approach to politics were openly preached in the valley.

Another similar attempt to organize a convention in 1981 was

frustrated by the decision of Sheikh Abdullah's government to ban the meeting.

Undoubtedly, it was only Sheikh Abdullah who could meet this new challenge, and indeed he was doing it admirably well. At the same time, he wanted to convey to the Union government that it would cost the nation dearly if they indulged in the toppling game in the state.

Sheikh Nazir was equally perturbed by these developments. One day he discussed the matter with me when I referred to the activities of Jamat-i-Tulba. He wasn't happy to see the growing influence of the Jamat. He said:

"This is bound to happen under the present circumstances. Even Sheikh Sahib is dubbed a communalist by those at the Centre! They can't differentiate between right and wrong."

"All this is the mischief of the local Congress(I)", I added agreeing with Nazir.

"But don't they at the Centre, know what Jamat-i-Islami is upto? You remember, how they maligned Sheikh Sahib last year. The entire press had, as it were, gone on war against us."

"Indiraji is getting wrong information from the state", I said, as I had heard about this in some quarters.

"Why? Isn't she the Prime Minister? She knows everything in detail. And, on top of it, doesn't she know that there is no doubt about the secular credentials of Sheikh Sahib? Then why these irresponsible statements against him, every now and then?", Nazir voiced his strong feelings as he was turning papers on his table while speaking,

"Thank God! the media are silent now; last year they voiced a lot of criticism", I said.

"All this depends on 'His Masters Voice'! The media receive a cue", he replied.

I was somewhat taken aback by his revelations. I didn't reply. In the meanwhile some workers came in to meet Sheikh Nazir. One of them took out a voucher from his pocket and, showing it to him, said:

"This payment is still due to me."

"We're still dealing with the expenses of the last year's meet-

ing." Sheikh Nazir said while showing the voucher to me.

"Which convention?" I asked.

"The congregation held when Farooq became President of the N.C.", said Nazir.

"Here are expenses incurred on vehicles and petrol. The vendors are chasing me for payments", said one worker.

"I'd settled your account earlier. Why are you coming up with this new demand?", asked Sheikh Nazir of the person. The man whispered something to him in his ear.

I got up and left the room leaving them alone.

Inspection work of Social Welfare Centres had increased under the control of Mrs. Nehru. Some carpet weaving centres had not been working satisfactorily for some time. So we had to pay surprise visits to some of the centres. Simultaneously, we inspected some centres for children's welfare and education in the rural areas. These centres were located in Bijbehara, Anantnag and Pahalgam and would take a whole day for inspection.

One day I went with Mrs. Nehru on a tour. En route we talked on many subjects. Those days she had been reading the *History of Kashmir* by P.N.K. Bamzai, and she asked me:

"Khemlata, tell me, have you read Bamzai's *History of Kashmir*?"

"No, not as yet. But I do wish to read it", I replied.

"Bamazai is a local Pandit?" she asked.

"Yes", I said.

"Do you know him?" she asked.

"Not only do I know him, his daughter is my sister-in-law."

"Your own Bhabhi?"

"Wife of my cousin", I replied.

"It is mentioned in that book that at one time only eleven Pandit families were left in Kashmir, all others had accepted Islam?" she asked.

"And my family is among one of those eleven", I added with a smile.

"Tell me, Khemlata, did your family also accept Islam?"

"No, never. Those who accepted Islam didn't return back to their fold", I replied.

Hearing my words, Piplani and Ms. Khurshid who were also accompanying us in the car had a laugh. Ms. Khurshid was Field Officer of the Social Welfare Board.

"In your opinion, why do you think conversions at a vast scale have taken place", Mrs. Nehru asked me.

"Mostly by force or attraction of Islamic mysticism, and perhaps because of the superstitions and internal disabilities of the Hindu religion."

"I would like to meet Bamzai personally. Does he visit Srinagar?" asked Madam Nehru.

"Yes, he comes here often."

We finished inspection of some centres and Mrs. Nehru then got busy talking details to the concerned officers. I got aside and talked to Ms. Khurshid. She said:

"People here are very communal in outlook. Every now and then, they ask if we are Hindu or Muslim by faith. What difference does it make anyway?"

"Why? Who asked you?" I enquired.

"You don't know, the way these people think. My elder sister is married to a Hindu. She has a nice little son too. . .", she paused.

"So what. If they're happy and satisfied, how are others concerned? Hope she doesn't find it inconvenient to live in a Hindu household?", I asked her.

"Inconvenience? She has become a 'pucca' Hindu instead. She doesn't even touch meat or fish", Khurshid informed me.

"Why so? Don't Hindus here take non-vegetarian food? There's no restriction in your home?" I said.

"Of course not. But she doesn't herself like such food now. And we also don't insist", she replied.

"Khurshid, you were referring to communal outlook. What made you say so?"

"I live in Baramullah with the family of Mubarak Shah. They all treat me like their own daughter. But when they learnt about my sister's marriage with a Hindu, their behaviour changed. They asked me not to introduce her to strangers in the house giving out her Hindu family name. I had felt quite hurt by such advice",

Khurshid said this with tears in her eyes.

"This was at Mubarak Shah's home? He was ambassador for sometime? And also a Cabinet Minister, I recollect", I mused.

"Yeah! Yeah! you're right."

I was quite upset by this. I wondered why we still have these glaring fissures due to caste and religion which not only impede our progress but also drag us backward. We are even drawn into bloodshed and murder over these differences. How long is it going to be so? When will the politicians stop exploiting people's emotions: let us overcome our suspicions and dichotomy, and get out of this stinking quagmire of communal hatred?

Sheikh Abdullah was strolling in his garden and talking to some engineers when I called on him one day. It seemed to me that he had just finished a meeting with them, and that he was giving them some instructions before departing. As they left, Sheikh's eyes met mine and he signalled me to come near him. As I sat in a chair, Dharamvir Singh Oberoi also dropped in. Before he talked to anyone of us, Sheikh Sahib said in a somewhat irritated tone:

"I don't understand why people here don't work with dedication. They are always ready with a plethora of excuses. See the people in Jammu, they receive much less funds but they work faster and better."

From the tone of his words we could make out what the matter was. And, we had seen the engineers going out too. Sensing the mood Oberoi said:

"Sir, people in Jammu are hard working, and they love their state. No wonder, they produce more and in lesser time."

"They have their own state! Their own country. What about these people? Isn't it theirs? They are not hardworking, want doles all the time."

I felt there was appreciable sorrow evident in Sheikh Sahib's tone. Thereafter, he talked about corruption, and I said:

"Corruption is prevalent all over. It is not present only in Kashmir but there is evidence in Jammu as well."

"They do take bribes, but they also accomplish work", said

Sheikh Sahib.

"I think the local weather conditions do also make a difference. It is so severely cold here that for days you can't do a thing", I said, in a tone suggesting that I was pleading in favour of the Kashmiri people. With that remark, Sheikh Sahib relaxed, his brows came back to their normal kindly posture, and he smiled without saying anything further. Thereafter Dharamvir Singh Oberoi came out with his problems about the Srinagar Municipality. As he also left, I began talking to Sheikh Abdullah about party matters, and the purpose of my interview with him. I said:

"You won't believe it, how well Farooq Jan is grooming as a leader. Not only that, he is also being immensely liked by the people."

As he heard these words, he felt elated and I could see a father's heart welling up with happy emotions.

"So what? Are you trying to plead a brief in his favour?", he asked me with a smile on his face.

"Not only am I pleading, but that is the wish of the people of the whole state. Everybody loves him", I said.

"He's the President of the party already. He hasn't shown any wonders yet", Sheikh Sahib said in a serious reflective tone.

"Man rises to the occasion at the appropriate time, and he's got that quality in him. And you may live long, there hasn't as yet been any need for him to bear the brunt", I replied.

I saw Ghulam Mohd. Shah coming to meet Sheikh Sahib. As I saw him, I begged leave to go, and was moving out when Shah met me, stopped to talk, and said:

"Have you poisoned his ears?"

I didn't say anything in reply, but exchanged a few pleasant-ries, smiled and left homeward.

Party meetings were frequent those days. One day, soon after such a meeting, I was returning home in my car. At a busy crossing in the Regal Chowk of Srinagar, as I turned my car into a by-lane, it was struck by a passenger bus coming fast on the main road. The door of my car was badly squashed and considerably damaged. One headlight was also broken completely. As the accident oc-

curbed the entire crossing was filled with many spectators. I was stuck in my car, helpless, and that was a hilarious spectacle for entertainment of the onlookers.

Before I could say a thing, or a few words in my defence, people were already shouting at the top of their voices:

"He should be arrested rightaway. Madam's car has been badly damaged." Some amongst the crowd were inspecting the damage done to the automobile.

"Why did he run away? He's a scoundrel, guilty and yet so haughty", said some others. In the meanwhile a police officer came from nearby and said to me:

"Madam, please give me the key of the car. I'll take it to the Kothi Bagh police station". We have sent men to arrest the driver. You may now go home. We'll let you know further in the matter."

"Let me accompany you to the police station. You might have to ask some questions. Otherwise I'll have to report again in that case", I said to the officer.

"Please rest assured. He'll be punished. We shall not let him go scot-free like that," the officer told me.

But I insisted to go along and went to the police station. There was a narrow corridor outside the room, where some civilians and policemen in uniform were chit-chatting. As I overheard their conversation, I was alerted and heard attentively what transpired.

"If you don't own up your guilt you'll rot in a prison for years."

"Don't you know who she is?"

"She's Khemlata Wakhlu."

"But it's not only my fault," it was perhaps the driver saying, I thought.

"Don't get on the wrong side of the government. You'll only break your head."

Thereafter, the dialogue went on in whispers and I could faintly hear only a few words:

"Four thousand. . . . three thousand. . . . this is too much for me."

I was quite distressed. On top of the shock of the accident, there was this harassment which I couldn't tolerate. The police-

men were making mincemeat of the driver to the extent they could. There wasn't any interrogation nor any investigation into the details of the accident. While they were talking outside, I strongly felt like going home without any more fuss.

In the meanwhile the officer came in and said:

"Madam, it's decided that you go to the workshop rightaway. The driver will pay up, whatever is the cost of repairs to the vehicle. You needn't worry. The car will be sent home to you."

"Please call a three wheeler for me. I want to go home. My family must be worried", I said.

"Don't you worry, please. I will get an auto for you", the bus driver reassured me. As I rose to move the driver said:

"Forget about the repairs to your car. Your brother is here to serve you." I was somewhat surprised by his tone and courtesy. "I'm leaving everything into your hands," I replied.

"My life is at your disposal, Madam", he said.

As a matter of fact, the temperament of Kashmiris appears to be somewhat related to the climate. If they are angry they lose all balance and control no matter whom they confront. And when the anger subsides and tempers cool, they are all courtesy. If one makes friends with someone, he could even lay down his life for him, while if they consider someone as a foe, they will leave no stone unturned to see him completely decimated.

Talking about this, I recollect another incident in the midst of Lal Chowk in Srinagar. I was driving my own car which stalled instantly as I was driving back home. No matter, how much I tried, I couldn't make a go of it. I was wondering what happened. Quite a few people were already pushing my vehicle from behind.

"Madam, dear sister, move the steering to the right," one said.

Like a robot I moved my wheel and suddenly awakened to the reality of having moved much distance away from the crossing. A crowd of people were pushing the car.

"Please stop, stop here."

"There is no petrol in the car."

"Nazira, you go and get some petrol in a canister."

"Take a large one. We'll top it up this time."

"Sister shouldn't get into trouble again."

These voices I heard distinct and clear. I was feeling quite embarrassed, not knowing how to respond. This was the first time I got into such a mess in the midst of a busy street. I was sweating, and feeling suffocated with so many people surrounding me and my vehicle. I was indeed like a helpless and lost child, feeling like a puppet in their hands. There and then a youngman, who looked like a leader of this group, at this juncture said to me:

"Madam, please pay seventeen rupees and twenty paise. We have poured the petrol in the vehicle."

I obeyed his order mechanically.

"Now you can go on happily. Get started."

"You've done so much for me. Thank you so much. Don't know, how to return this good turn", somehow I managed to say these few words.

"All your brothers are there to serve you."

These profound words of love gave me strange happiness tinged with sorrow. Tears welled up in my eyes, and they perceived how moved I was without my having uttered any more words.

"Get started now, please."

"Don't pull out the choke enroute, your car will stop due to excess of petrol."

"Also get the self checked."

"Are the headlights O.K.?"

So helpful were all these young men, I reflected, how innocent and how nice they are. Even while I was moving along slowly they instructed me as elder brothers would teach their younger sister. Their behaviour was joyful and full of love, something I can never forget all my life.

The meeting of the old Boys' Association of the Sri Pratap College, Srinagar was held in the month of September. Sheikh Abdullah was Chief Guest on the occasion, being also an old boy of the college. Among others present in the college were Samsar Chand Vaishnavi, a distinguished teacher and educator, Janki Nath Baxi, a former civil servant, and Qazi, another elderly former student. They spoke to the audience about the good old days

of the college. Thereafter Sheikh Abdullah also addressed the audience. He said: "When we were young, we had to walk a long way on foot to come to College. Come sunshine, come cold and snow, we had to walk virtually barefoot. We didn't even have enough clothes to cover our body. The fees in school and college were low, a few pennies. But people didn't have even that much cash to pay. We lived, not like humans, but animals. We have come a long way from those bad days to the better times today. Poverty, misery, ignorance and illiteracy were then rampant amongst people.

But now the world is changed. You are very fortunate. Your life is better and we have from time to time removed the thorns on your way toward a better and beautiful life. We are still working towards improvements. And you have to carry forward this task where we leave it. You have to carry forward the nation on the path of progress and modernization."

And indeed, changes, progress and improvements in Kashmir were not hidden from anyone. Schools and colleges were busy in academic and cultural programmes. Male and female students were moving about together uninhibited inside campuses and outside. Theatrical performances by the young people and activities of their clubs became frequent and improved. There was a sudden spurt in the growth of cinema houses, hotels, and guest houses reflecting the growing activity in the tourist trade. The number of vehicles operating as taxis, public transport and privately owned automobiles increased phenomenally. Young girls attired in dresses of the latest mode were enhancing the glamour of many homes. There seemed to be no dearth of money. Beauty parlours opened by the dozens.

To meet their growing expenditure at home, people resorted to any means to amass more money. Rich businessmen, traders, fruit merchants, and others of their ilk built mansions for their residence, which were complete with fountains and Taj Mahal like marble verandahs. And for many amongst the middle class, keeping up with the Joneses became inevitable.

Not only this, feasting on the occasion of marriage parties also became lavish. "Wazwan" (the grand feast of rice and mutton)

became the order of the day; without this feast the occasion was incomplete, nay, dry and dreary. The "trami" (large copper plate coated with tin carrying food for four persons) was served with fifteen to twenty delicacies of mutton etc. And those of the middle class who could not afford such lavish expenditure, were compelled by social pressure to stake everything and somehow manage to retrieve their social status and honour by falling in line with others.

This abundance of money created conflict between the old and the new in society; there was an absence of new and stable values. What appeared to be so much progress, was actually only a superficial change in the visible lifestyle of the rich middle class in the cities and towns.

No matter what progress was being made, and howsoever the society was changing and taking a new turn in its growth and development, it was not to the liking of the priesthood, or the protagonists of orthodox religions. In particular the Jamatis did not take kindly to these changes at all. Politically, at least, they were quite sore about all this. In their private lives at home, they too welcomed these changes as inevitable, and in the best interests of their own progeny. They were always eager to destroy the peace and tranquility of this green and prosperous happy valley with the poisonous acid of narrow-mindedness and orthodoxy. But, while Sheikh Sahib was alive these people did not succeed, no matter how much they tried. All the same, they left nothing to chance and exploited every situation as they came handy.

There was a fairly large number of students from Iran studying in the various colleges in Srinagar. Many amongst them were from the modern camp who had run away from home. But there was a larger and more vociferous group of them who at all times propagated the fundamentalist ideas of Ayatullah Khoemeni. These students forced their compatriot girl students to wear the "chaddor" publicly, often against their wishes. And gradually these females from Iran wearing the special veil became a conspicuous sight in Srinagar. And these groups became quite thick with the local Jamat-i-Islami both seeing eye to eye on many issues. The seeds of a new ideology were sown on fertile soil with

the result that these sprouted and started growing. The results were not very much hidden from view. School and college girls in Srinagar were soon to be seen wearing the "roomal" or the "chador" on their heads and bodies, here and there. The fashion hadn't yet caught on but one could see which way the wind was blowing.

In April 1982, the Jammu and Kashmir State Legislative Assembly passed the "Resettlement Bill". The controversial bill related to the resettlement of those Kashmiri people in the State who had been living in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) or in Pakistan at the time of partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

Sometime before this bill was cleared by the assembly, a respectable Kashmiri, who had migrated to POK at the time of partition, had met me at the residence of Sheikh Abdullah, whom I visited early morning that day. The gentleman was elderly looking and rather short statured, and as I entered he was already sitting in the visitors room in the house.

I had surmised from his physical appearance that he was of Kashmiri origin, but I was meeting him for the first time. Although I was familiar with everyone in my party, I wasn't sure if he belonged to our party or not. Anyway, as we met there, he began the conversation. As we talked, I gathered that he had come on a private visit from Pakistan. He had met Sheikh Sahib earlier and had talked to him at length. Today, he was going to continue his interview with him again. Later when they talked together, Sheikh Sahib called him Mirsahib, but I don't recollect his name fully now. As we waited in the room, we talked.

"Do you believe that emigre Kashmiris will return back here from Pakistan?"

"There's no possibility of their return. Who's going to leave behind the assets and property acquired over forty years? Coming here would mean getting uprooted elsewhere and starting from scratch again", he replied.

"People here, and in particular our partymen, wish to see the day when Kashmiris will meet again, get united, and meet each other without any hindrances", I said.

"Paying an occasional visit or being able to travel freely is one

thing, but nobody is going to come and settle here. You see two of my sons are fairly high up and well placed officers in the Government. Both are married and settled in Lahore. My own property is in Muzaffarabad, which comprises among other things a five acre garden. Besides, do you think Pakistan and India will let this come about?", he clarified at length.

"Pakistan and India should have no objection, I think", I said.

"There is no trust between them, instead there is suspicion and apprehension about motives. Under such circumstances even simple issues appear complicated", Mir observed putting weight of his age and experience behind his words.

Then we talked about the progress made by people in Kashmir. He was happy to learn and see that women here were working side by side with men. I informed him that women did not only serve as teachers but that many of them worked as doctors, engineers and advocates. I added that this change had come about as a result of the long term vision of Sheikh Abdullah.

Mir Sahib was proved right soon thereafter. Whereas, the Resettlement Bill had been passed by the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly, it was not welcomed by the people in other parts of the country. Indeed there was a furore in the national press against the provisions of the bill. The media succeeded in creating the impression that Kashmir was leaning towards Pakistan.

In this context, the relations between the State and the Centre became strained and seeds of suspicion began to sprout again. The rank and file in the National Conference began to perceive the hand of Congress (I) in these adverse developments, and in particular suspected the State unit of this party for playing a major role in the affair. With Sheikh's deft handling the episode ended leaving behind merely a whimper. And this fact was common knowledge. All the same, the matter was projected as detrimental to the national interest. It was suggested that the provisions of the bill would ultimately lead to lot of interchange and movement of people encouraging the growth of Kashmir as a base for international espionage and lead to its becoming the nerve centre of spies from all over the world. A situation of that type may not be

impossible to control, but it will certainly prove extremely complicated.

Around this time, there was commotion and turmoil amongst students in Srinagar on account of the problem of Palestinians. The local students joined with the Palestinian students and carried out processions in Srinagar. The students of the University and colleges were no doubt in the fray, but the people at large were also embroiled in the protests and ensuing turmoil. Arsonists set fire to many buildings and there was incessant stone throwing on public vehicles and security police, resulting in police firing on the mobs. Opponents of the ruling party were as always in search of such moments, when the relations between the State and Centre were strained, and there was a law and order problem created simultaneously. The opposition was hoping to reap political advantage from these events in its favour. The National Conference workers were, however, by now quite familiar with these tactics and always eager to meet the challenge with their own counter propaganda.

As mentioned earlier, the National Conference was, by now, quite warmed up to group politics between the leadership of Dr. Farooq and G.M. Shah. Everyone loyal to their leaders was vouchsafing the cause of their chosen group leader. Shah's group in the party was quite large. Those belonging to his group and loyal to him had advised the party workers to vociferously express their support for Mr. Shah whenever he would rise to address the workers meeting. As soon as he alighted from his car in the compound of Mujahid Manzil, the premises resounded with the slogan:

"Gulshah, Padshah! Gulshah Padshah!" (G.M. Shah King!). And the slogans continued as he was ushered into the meeting hall.

Amidst the roar of applause he was accompanied by a group of people upto the rostrum. Although the show was stagemanaged, yet I would admit, that people in our group (Farooq's group) turned blue with envy over these events. No doubt, the people did control the reins to some extent, but everyone was aware that the end of the reins and the whip were controlled elsewhere. And they

knew who it was that had the real control. The clever party workers in each group, therefore, did not mind keeping their respective leaders in a fool's paradise as well as obliged to themselves. More so, it was a tactical gimmick, because they were not certain which way the wind would blow and when, and who would ultimately don the mantle of leadership and become the Chief Minister.

During the zonal meeting of the party at Sarwar I had requested the members to call Farooq Abdullah to these meetings in order to bring the young, dynamic president in direct contact with the party workers and let them be familiar with his vision and ideas. On hearing these remarks from me the stalwarts in the meeting looked at each other as if to convey: "You see, propaganda for Farooq has already begun".

There were efforts already afoot to consolidate the Farooq group and improve its clout within the party. Shri D.D. Thakur, Dharamvir Singh Oberoi, Sheikh Nazir, and Sheikh Rashid among many other workers were in the forefront of these efforts. The youth were all in favour of Dr. Farooq. But those in the party who had been to jail and suffered, or those who had worked for it for many years, were in favour of G.M. Shah as their leader. Such support for him was quite evident in the party. The General Secretary of the Party, Mr. Mohi-ud-din Shah also favoured G.M. Shah. His loyalty was natural because G.M. Shah was his uncle.

When we went to the Srinagar airport to receive the President of India, Shri Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, all the leaders and party workers were present on the occasion. Farooq Abdullah, the party president, looked happy and in command of the party reception. People were happily hob-nobbing with him and shook hands. Sheikh Abdullah was visibly delighted to witness this scene. People became very much aware of this and readily knew what the Sheikh desired deep down in his heart.

Farooq Abdullah addressed the summer school participants in an inaugural function at the Regional Engineering College, Srinagar. He made a very forceful speech lambasting all and sundry leaders in the political arena, as well as highlighting the deficiencies in every sphere of life in the country. He did not even

hesitate to acknowledge facts publicly and said:

"All of us in politics are thieves. We hoodwink, cheat, and mislead the people. And on top of it, we aren't ashamed. Instead, we boast."

The speech was well received by the audience which included a large number of professors and intellectuals from all over the country. This kind of frank talk, and that too from a young political leader, had greatly impressed everyone present, so much so that for minutes at the end of his speech, the audience gave a standing ovation to Dr. Farooq. That evening the refrain of every conversation was: "Here's a leader, who sure will achieve some results."

When I returned home on 11th June 1982, someone called me on phone and informed me that Beg Sahib had passed away. I was terribly upset and grieved.

Next day, I came to know that Sheikh Sahib had visited Beg Sahib at his residence to enquire about his health. Many of my colleagues were witness to the visit. Begum Afzal Beg had greeted Sheikh Abdullah with sarcasm and shed tears of grief lamenting that she had not expected him (Sheikh Sahib) to treat her husband so shabbily after fortyfive years long association. Farooq Abdullah was also present at this moment, and it appeared that the threads of unity within the party were being picked up again, or at least an attempt was being made in that direction.

With the death of Beg Sahib, Sheikh's own mental posture suffered a setback. He might also have remembered about his fortyfive year long association of Beg side by side with him in the political arena. Their mutual suspicion, and even their ultimate parting of ways cannot be commented upon now. Also I don't want to get into a controversy over whether the decision was right or wrong. But this much I wish to say without any hesitation that Sheikh Abdullah felt quite distressed at Beg's death particularly so soon after his expulsion.

On 13th June 1982, when I visited Mujahid Manzil, it wore a bleak and forlorn look. On enquiry, I came to know that the Sheikh was indisposed. I thought, I should straightaway go to his home. As I was leaving, I met Sheikh Rashid near the gate. He

was in his car, and we proceeded to Sheikh Abdullah's residence. He was asleep and had been advised complete rest by his physicians. It was said that he had been quite tired. Begum Abdullah was quite worried that day. Also her two daughters, Begum Khalida Shah, and Mrs. Surraya Ali looked rather anxious and apprehensive. Sheikh Nazir was frequently seen to be coming out and going into Sheikh's bedroom.

People within the party including myself were worried and anxious. Many had asked me then: "Will Sheikh Sahib be able to come out of his illness?"

I would give them only a suggestive but negative reply. Earlier in 1977, when Sheikh Sahib had been taken seriously ill, I had said to my colleagues, a week before his illness: "He would become seriously ill. But he'd be well again and resume his work."

They, namely Mr. G.M. Shah, Badarwahi, Abdul Samad Teli, Hissam-ud-din Bandey and many others, had taken my prediction lightly at that time. But when he did fall ill soon after, they had all come to me and asked: "What next?" And in reply, I had said: "Everything will be fine." And he was quite well again. My colleagues had firmly believed that whatever I predict, comes out true. That's why they were asking me again this time about the course of his illness.

On 23rd June 1982, he fell ill again after suffering a massive attack in his office. He was taken home soon after and placed under intensive care. Hundreds of his followers and well-wishers flocked to his residence and packed every nook and corner. There was an air of intense gloom all over. I met members of the family and prayed with them for his long healthful life.

Thereafter, I went straight to the residence of Shri D.D. Thakur. He was sitting in the lawn of his house in the company of his guest Shri I.K. Gujral (Foreign Minister of India, in the Janta Dal Govt. December 1989 - November 1990). The main theme of the conversation then was the important question? "After Sheikh Abdullah? Who?"

It must be recorded here that about Dr. Farooq, we three were in complete agreement. Although, Shri Gujral was quite reticent

about the matter, but he listened to me intently while I talked about the good points and qualities of Farooq.

Nearby lived Shri M.K. Tikku, Cabinet Minister in Sheikh's Government, and we went to see him soon thereafter. He was anxiously strolling in his drawing room when I entered in. He looked worried. As he saw me, he was pleased and said:

"Sheikh Sahib's illness has upset everything. God knows what will follow now?"

"His illness is quite critical. Who knows if he'll come out of it?", I replied with anxiety writ large on my face.

"Don't know, what turn the political situation will take now? I'm afraid the party might breakup", said Tikku Sahib reflecting on the scene. He looked gravely worried.

"The party will never disintegrate. And, of course, Farooq will eventually take care of everything."

As Tikku Sahib heard me say this, his face exhibited greater concern and seriousness. He avoided saying anything in this context and instead talked to my husband on some other matters.

Within a few days, on the 28th June, I called on Shri B.K. Nehru, Governor of Jammu & Kashmir at the Raj Bhavan. It was a long interview, and in the context of Sheikh's illness, he enquired from me at length, about the leadership question in the party, should such a situation arise. Shri Nehru was of the firm belief by now that I was pro-Farooq. All the same he asked:

"What is the majority public opinion? I've learnt that the National Conference is now split into two groups—one for Farooq and another for Shah."

"Yes, it's true. The party workers are split into two groups. But the majority of the public accept only Farooq as Sheikh's heir. He is a modern and progressive youngman of the present generation. People here have great expectations of him", I emphasized my words sufficiently.

"What does Begum Sahiba want? For her, it's quite a ticklish question, rather a serious problem. On the one side is her son, and on the other her daughter."

Mr. Nehru had asked me this question as if he knew the answer already. Now that the matter was brought up by him, I deemed it

only proper to reply: "I am not in a position to speak about Begum Sahiba's views. After all, she is a mother and would like to see both sides pleased."

"But that's easier said than done", he said. "I know one thing for certain. Sheikh Sahib wants his son to lead the state." I made that statement with full confidence. Thereafter, we talked about the views of other people on the nature and prospects of the two contenders for the Chief Minister's position. I gathered that many other wellwishers like me had put in a word in favour of Dr. Farooq.

Chapter 13

Lion of Kashmir is no more

SHEIKH Sahib's illness was a matter of grave concern for everyone. I was quite worried too, rather whole of Kashmir was steeped in anxiety about the future. People did not know what turn the events will take after being at the crossroad of history. Who will fill the vacuum after Sheikh Abdullah. Naturally, everyone prayed for the succession of person he favoured most.

An acquaintance dropped in at my home alongwith another person, who appeared to be and indeed was a "darvish". He was a wellwisher of the Sheikh. After we got to know each other, he handed over to me a copper bangle and a special ring and said:

"These are a bangle and a ring from Dastgir Sahib for protection. If Sheikh Sahib wears these, he will be well again."

I took these items and thought that there should be no objection if he wears them.

And indeed, I took these items and went to his home. That time he was slightly better but not allowed to see anyone. Begum Abdullah was meeting the callers, though. So I handed over these items to her saying: "A 'darvish' has given these to me. He has directed that Papa should wear the bangle and the ring." I showed my anxiety and concern. "He can't wear the bangle. But the ring I shall put on his finger. Some darvish has given this?", she enquired. "He's a well known and respected mystic. If it were something to eat I wouldn't bring it. But wearing the ring is no problem", I explained to her. "Whoever has offered it has given it with love and respect. And these talismans are often quite potent in their effects. It's common saying that faith is even stronger and higher than the mystic or the priest. And, I do have faith in these. Look, some other people have given me these", Begum Sahiba said pointing towards a pouchful of talismans.

Sheikh Sahib did get well after this severe bout of illness. But, he had become very weak and frail. Whoever would see his state of health, was apprehensive and wondered if he would get fully well at all. His legs and feet were swollen with oedema, and his face was pale and unhealthy.

People continued to call on him and enquire after his health. One day he was sitting on his sofa. A servant was pressing his legs. Dr. S.N. Peshin, a well known surgeon and colleague of Sheikh Sahib in the earlier days of the struggle, was sitting by his side and they were chatting intimately. I dropped in, sat on another chair and listened to their conversation. They were remembering the days of their old association. The conversation was very interesting as it threw light on the ups and downs of the struggle led by Sheikh Abdullah for half a century for the emancipation of the people of the state.

As Dr. Peshin got up to leave he took time to explain to Sheikh Sahib, as a doctor and friend, the need for restraint and self-discipline for keeping good health. In fact, he was discreetly telling him not to indulge in his delight for good richly cooked food.

And in reply Sheikh Sahib retorted: "Enough is enough. Who's bothered with discipline at this age?"

When Dr. Peshin left Sheikh Sahib told me: "Do you follow your established traditions? Are you aware of the past?" I was not prepared for such queries from him, and looked at him with blank eyes, as if to convey that I don't see the purpose of his question. "Our past was glorious. Our ancestors used to regularly pray in their traditional ways and remember God. Thereby they acquired such spiritual powers that they could achieve what they wished. Kashmiris—our ancestors have achieved great feats. They were not only intelligent but also farsighted. Do you know?"

"But I don't follow the traditional ways myself". Instead he went on to say: "Iqbal was born in a saproo, brahmin family. They had been Muslims only for two generations. We all belong to the same family. Our civilization had spread not only in India but to the other countries as well. Our culture has given birth to great

and eminent physicians, poets and historians." "Suyya too was a Kashmiri engineer", I added another name to his sentences. "We should be proud of our glorious past. And, that alone is not enough. We must also strive to tread on the good path they have shown us. We've had great saints and mystics here, Noor-ud-din Noorani, and Lala Ded are, of course, the splendid examples of our cultural heritage", he went on saying. It was obvious he was thinking aloud, and like a student I listened to him with attention. "But those values have ended. Things have changed now. There is so much greed now that one is prepared to go to any extent to satisfy his greed. Men, women, and children, all have some norms. Women loved all children as their own. All the children of the neighbourhood were treated by mothers as belonging to one family. Nowadays, women indulge in such things which cannot even be mentioned."

As he spoke thus, he suddenly paused; he was reflecting for a while.

I was reminded of an incident which took place two years earlier when there was unrest in Anantnag. Then Sheikh Sahib had revealed to me that: "In Anantnag, men apart even women had begun to habitually consume alcohol". I was amazed to hear this and did not believe my ears then. "Yes, it's a fact. We have reports from the police about this", he had clarified with a smile.

My chain of thoughts was broken as a servant entered Sheikh Sahib's room with some medicines. He handed over the capsules to him for swallowing the prescribed dose.

During this period my presence at the party headquarters had become necessary everyday. I was Secretary of the Provincial Executive Committee and was functioning in place of Sheikh Nazir as well. He was deeply engrossed with the nursing of Sheikh Sahib and looking after him generally in respect of his other engagements as well. There were many zonal, district and provincial committee meetings of the party every now and then. Like a swarm of honeybees the party big-wigs from various districts would be visibly propagating their respective viewpoints.

On the occasion of Id, G.M. Shah was anxious and worried. When I called on him to convey my greetings on the day, he

looked quite depressed. Sitting with him were Mr. Kochak, Hissam-ud-din Bandey, Abdul Ahad Vakil, and Mr. Rishi. As they saw me enter the room, they gave me a meaningful look. All of them were by now aware that I was putting in all my efforts to garner support for Dr. Farooq. Having had formal chit-chat and exchange of pleasant talk, as I stood up to beg leave of them, Hissam-ud-din Bandey also stood up. While we walked some distance, upto where our cars were parked, Bandey sung lot of praises of Shah Sahib. He wanted to impress on me that only Shah can rightly lead the state in the days to come. Nobody else, he clarified, had the needed ability to discharge this onerous responsibility. I didn't say much in response. But nodded my assent in a broad sort of agreement.

On 9th August there was a major congregation in Mujahid Manzil. Workers and office bearers of the party belonging to both the groups had come in full strength for this meeting. As Farooq finished his presidential address to the workers, all of them stood up immediately and began to surround him. Making my way through the crowd, as I got down the stairs, and was nearing the exit doors, Dr. Farooq called out aloud to me from behind:

"Khem Lataji, please wait for a moment. I've to talk something urgent to you." As he said so, he approached towards me. When we met he said: "Please come with me in my car. I'll brief you and tell you something." He opened the door of his wagon and offered me to take my seat. In the wagon, I saw Dharamvir Singh and two other friends of Farooq already seated. As the car drove on, Farooq said to me: "Before that. . . Mohi-ud-din Shah meets Papa and tells him anything, you better go there just now and tell him all about today's proceedings. They are determined to ruin our chances. Please make sure you communicate everything properly", Farooq said, while he was himself on the wheel of the fast moving vehicle. "I think, Papa has already made up his mind in our favour. And of course, I have spoken to him on this score many times before", I said to him trying to reassure him at the same time. "You don't know how many enemies we have. One can't predict what all they might attempt", said Farooq's friends from behind our seats. I heard Oberoi also joining his voice with

theirs'.

By this time we were near the residence of Sheikh Sahib. They dropped me there. As I alighted from the car Farooq said: "We are going. Do a good job of it. Make it pucca." I heard a chorus of voices behind my back to that effect.

As I entered the house, I found Sheikh Sahib cheerful and in a relaxed mood. He was sitting on a sofa. As our eyes met I said: "Congratulations, Papa! Congrats! It's a marvellous speech by Farooq Jan today. People were thrilled and happy. There was loud applause of welcome for him. They have accepted him as their leader from the core of their hearts."

He was delighted and his face glowed with happiness as he heard my words. Perhaps it was for hearing this good news that he was waiting. He asked me pointedly as to who were the other persons present in the meeting. He also questioned me about the main points that Farooq touched upon in his speech.

My memory of Farooq's words was still fresh in my mind and I related the contents verbatim to him. Even today that speech rings in my ears wherein he had unabashedly condemned the political leadership. He had also declared publicly: "Leaders are corrupt, liars, they rob people, get away safely with all they snatch". Such words had created the impression amongst people that here was a messiah, liberator of the oppressed people who would eliminate their sorrows and usher in an era of bounty and prosperity for them. They also expected him to cleanse the corrupt apparatus of the State government.

When I narrated the speech to Sheikh Sahib, he paused, and became reflective. After a while he asked me: "Did he name anybody in his speech?" Before I could answer his question, Mohi-ud-din Shah entered the room. Seeing me, already in the room, he was visibly taken aback. His face turned ashen. Perhaps he had dropped in to canvass for his candidate, or even to suggest that the emotionally charged speech by Farooq Abdullah was not appropriate or even desirable. Whatever the purpose or motive of his visit, however, finding me there made him quite upset. He was indeed in a fix not knowing how to begin his conversation. In my presence, obviously he didn't want to criticize Farooq's speech.

Sensing his predicament, I broke the ice and said: "O.K. Papa, I take leave. You ought to rest now. You need a lot of rest." I got up to move and he asked: "Do you have a conveyance?" "No, I'll manage myself". He called out his servant and directed him to arrange a car lift for me.

That was the last time I saw Sheikh Sahib alive. This was my parting conversation with him, as fate ordained that I'd never meet him again. I vividly remember his benign face that reflected the love of a father and the compassion and pride of a leader.

I was back home soon. After some rest, I went for a walk along the boulevard on the Dal Lake. I was accompanied by my husband. As we were strolling along, we saw Dr. Farooq alongwith some friends driving in his car along the road. As he saw me, he stopped his vehicle, came out and talked to me. He enquired about the interview I have had with Sheikh Sahib. I narrated the details to him including mention of the arrival of Mohi-ud-din Shah to meet him. "It's good you were in time to see him. Who knows what might have been otherwise conveyed to Papa." "I'm confident that nobody can now influence his personal opinion", I said emphatically. "You don't know Shah. They're all hovering around Papa these days. They don't even let him breathe freely", Farooq said with an odour of hate against Shah in his voice. And he didn't hesitate to give vent to such feelings in public.

On 15th August 1982, G.M. Shah was to take the salute on the Independence day celebrations at Srinagar. However, at the last minute this did not come about because of squabbles on the issue in the Sheikh household. Instead D.D.Thakur, as the next senior Cabinet Minister took the salute.

On the same day at 5 p.m. there was a reception given by the Chief Minister to the citizens of Srinagar, in the famous Emporium Gardens. Such a gathering was a regular feature on the Independence Day. However, even on this occasion Shah Sahib chose to remain absent from the scene. Although Sheikh Sahib was very frail in health at the time, he did attend the function. Every guest went near him turn by turn, courtesied and shook hands. Two persons had to help him as he rose from the sofa and was slowly moving to his car. Everyone, who shook his hands

looked glum and anxious. There was a feeling in everyone's heart that this was perhaps the last time when they had the privilege of such a personal encounter with him.

Although Shah did not turn up at the reception, yet at that very moment people had begun speculating and spreading rumours about the future. People believed that, come what may, Shah is hell bent on becoming Chief Minister rightaway even while Sheikh Sahib was still alive.

At this critical juncture I was hospitalized for some immediately needed surgery in the Lal Dad hospital, Srinagar. Without my knowledge, Mrs. Shobha Nehru had telephoned the hospital superintendent that she would be calling on me on 17th August. As the word spread that Madam Governor was visiting the hospital, a number of workers came and did thorough cleaning of my room and the corridors. The hospital had been newly built and the mosaic floor had not perhaps even been polished fully as yet.

So there was lot of commotion in the room. Floor polishing was going on, some nurses changed the beds and sheets, the choicest blankets were spread. And above all, the water closet got a thorough clean-up perhaps after a long while. No doubt, it was all so nice but one wished that the entire hospital could be always well maintained for every patient.

I remembered the hospital I was admitted into at Birmingham, England, way back in the sixties. The experience was unforgettable, and in comparison with our hospitals it was unparalleled. Meticulously clean.

Mrs. Nehru arrived as scheduled and told me frankly that she knew things would be all trim after she telephoned about her visit. She said: "I came today to look up everything. I didn't want to disturb you after the operation." There was love and compassion in her words. Then she inspected the room minutely and told the hospital staff: "Change this curtain. Get a better coloured one. The patient is already frail and this dull colour makes her worse." And the curtains were replaced thereafter on her orders. While taking leave to go Madam Nehru thoughtfully gifted me a bottle of Eu de cologne which came very handy during my recovery after the surgery was done.

All my colleagues in the party including senior office bearers visited me in the hospital whereby I was updated on the political developments in the State.

On the 23rd August, Dr. Farooq Abdullah was inducted as a member of the cabinet in Sheikh's Government and given the portfolio of Health and Medical Education. People were quite happy over this development and many partymen had congratulated me while I was still in the hospital.

The very next day Dr. Farooq called on me and enquired about my health. I congratulated him for taking on the new responsibilities in the government. He was in a jolly good mood and had carried a bouquet for me. "Better get well soon. We've got to do a lot of work together", he said. "Of course, we've got to work. There are many a hurdles to be overcome, one by one", I replied reassuringly.

The same day Begum Abdullah accompanied by her younger daughter Begum Surraya Ali, visited me. Begum looked unusually worried. Sheikh Sahib was not too well. As she took her seat, she said: "Sheikh Sahib is not well at all. Just now the doctor examined him". "Papa is getting weaker day by day. We came to visit you, while we left him alone for a while", added Surraya.

"Oh, no. You shouldn't have left him like that. I'll get back home within a couple of days anyway", I said expressing my obvious concern and anxiety about his health.

Begum Sahiba gave me a few tips for speedy recovery and advised me not to work too hard for some time.

Thereafter, I did return home and took rest while convalescing.

On 3rd September, the condition of Sheikh Abdullah worsened critically. The news spread fast throughout the state, and people were distressed. Prayers were offered in numerous mosques for his speedy recovery. While people were grossly absorbed in prayers for his recovery, at the same time they were not certain if their beloved leader would at all be able to survive and come out of this critical illness. They feared that this might as well be his last and parting illness.

While the mood of the people was so, there was a different kind of turmoil within the leader's household. Even after Dr.

Farooq took over as a Minister in the Cabinet, Shah Sahib and his supporters in the party had very much hoped and wished that he alone should take the reins of the government in his hands. That there was discussion and squabbling over this issue was obvious from what Sheikh Nazir revealed to my husband when he called on him to enquire about Sheikh's health. "Some people are hell bent on taking his life. They don't let him have peace even in this condition. What else do you expect except a heart attack?"

When I learnt about this situation, there was a wrench in my heart. I was annoyed with those people—to whom Sheikh Nazir had alluded, not once, but on many occasions before—who were determined not to let him have peace even at this critical juncture. Sheikh Nazir had also expressed his annoyance to Mr. Rishi, whom he knew to be a loyal supporter in the camp of G.M. Shah.

And such was the power of these words of Sheikh Nazir, that no sooner had he uttered them than it was the talk of the town. It was said in the bazars of Kashmir that Sheikh Sahib's critical illness arose from a heart attack that ensued after an altercation between him and G.M. Shah. Shah was being squarely cursed in every household, and such was the fury generated that people began to hunt for Shah Sahib's head! Whoever called on me to enquire about my health would leave behind bitter words against Shah.

Till today, I have not been able to get an authentic version of this event. I don't know if this episode of altercation between Sheikh and Shah is true or not. Nor do I know, what role, if any, Begum Abdullah played at that moment. But from what I knew, from very close, about her attitude all along, there is no doubt in my mind at all, that she very much wished to see her son and son-in-law on the best of terms with each other. She did not like to see her household divided over the leadership issue under any circumstances.

Sheikh's condition was getting worse with each passing day. Bulletins about his health and general condition began to be issued outside his residence, and announced to the huge hordes of people waiting outside, anxiety writ large on their faces.

On 6th September, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of

India, landed in Srinagar. She called on the Sheikh family and enquired about the Chief Minister's health at his home. At this time, Mrs. Gandhi and Sheikh Sahib had become friends again. Earlier during the summer months, Rajiv Gandhi, General Secretary of Congress (I) and Farooq Abdullah had played a significant role at a personal family level to bring about this rapprochement between the two leaders. Sheikh Sahib had been particularly touched and pleased when Rajiv Gandhi had personally called on him at his home to clear the mist of misunderstanding. These efforts had begun in May-June 1982.

On 8th September, very early in the morning I called on Dr. Farooq at his home. When he met me, I saw his eyes swollen and red. He looked dishevelled and it was apparent that he had not slept the previous night. Sheikh's illness had gripped everybody in deep anxiety. Indeed, I had called on Farooq in order to empathize with him.

"Papa is severely ill" he said in a broken tired voice.

"His illness is critical. It's doubtful if he survives at all", I said deliberately in order to make him aware of the reality.

"Yeah! I know it too. And, I am prepared to face it. Anything might happen any moment", his words touched my heart and tears welled up in my eyes. I said: "It's a fact that our dear Papa—our leader Sheikh Sahib—is now on the threshold of his last journey. You have got to take courage at this juncture, roll up your sleeves, courageously move forward and lead the state. From now on you shall have to move ahead more assertively. That will be your greatest tribute to Papa's memory." Even though he listened to my words quietly yet he appeared to get peeved by some of his own thoughts deep down. He said: "I don't know what you and D.D.Thakur think about me. I will surprise everybody. Even you'll be astonished. You see!"

There was a challenge in his words.

"I shall be damn pleased to see that winning cup in your hands", I replied. Hearing these words he relaxed and smiled.

A couple of days earlier, two high ranking members of the National Conference, namely Abdui Samad Teli, Member Legislative Assembly, and Ghulam Mohd. Waugnoo, President of the

Nigeen Block, with several other colleagues, had called on me at my residence. After enquiring about my health they began talking about what was uppermost in their minds.

"Khem Lataji, please tell us who is coming forward as leader after Sheikh Sahib?", asked Mr. Waugnoo unhesitatingly as if I alone had all the answers to his query. "Sheikh Sahib's condition is very critical now. Anytime we might get the bad news about him. We thought, you would be knowing the truth from within the household. So we might as well share the news", said Abdul Samad Teli, carefully weighing his words as is his wont.

"Why? Don't you already know who is in the forefront? What's the idea of asking me further about it?", I said so in order that they might understand the obvious.

Then another worker said: "Shah Sahib's followers are so jubilant, as if he is taking over tomorrow as Chief Minister."

"Which followers? Let me know a few names please", I asked.

"It was Noor Mohd. Para and Rishi Sahib, who were talking to us yesterday about this. They were very emphatic in what they said", replied Ghulam Nabi Bhat.

"They've to say all that in order to demoralize us", I reassured them.

"Yeah! We do understand, Lataji. We also want what you desire. But what are the moves at Delhi?", asked Abdul Samad.

"Farooq Sahib is your leader and he'll be also the Chief Minister", I said this with obvious affirmation having taken a cue from what Governor Nehru has said to me.

Hearing this, they were all happy because they knew that Shah Sahib had played a major role in the ouster of late Beg Sahib from the party. "God dispenses appropriate justice for the actions of men", said Waugnoo.

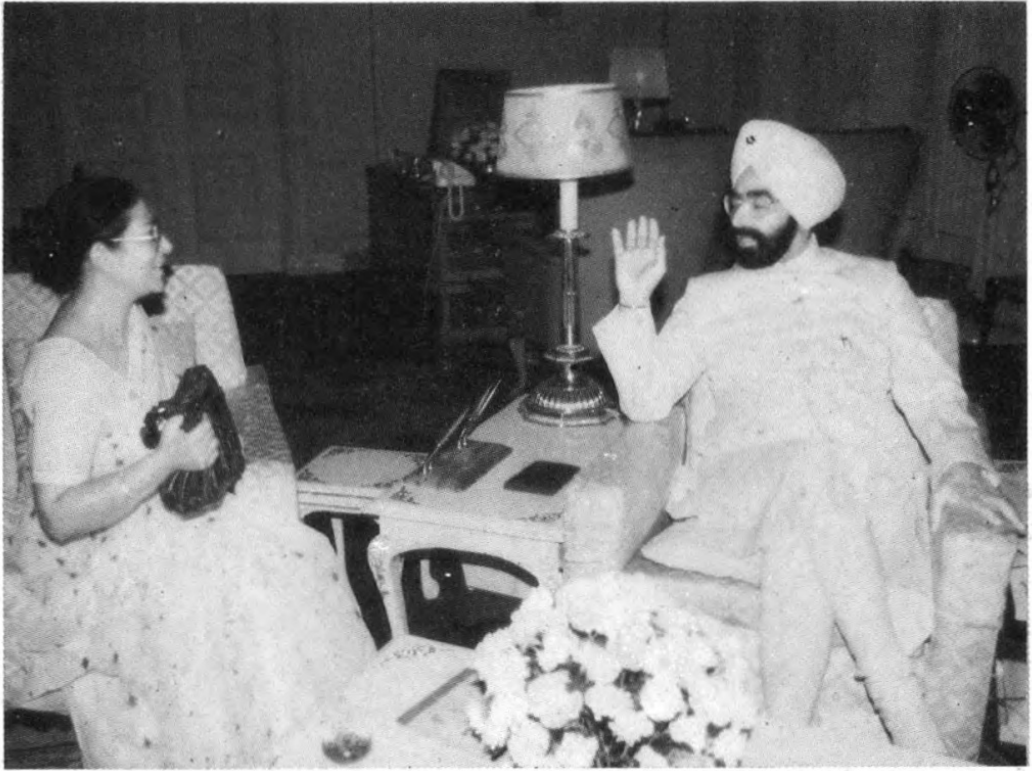
The same evening Prof. R.N. Dogra and his wife Mrs. Neera Dogra called on us at our home. Prof. Dogra, a former Director of the I.I.T. Delhi was presently in Srinagar as the guest of Governor Nehru and stayed at Raj Bhavan. We talked about the illness of Sheikh Sahib. Everybody was anxious. We hadn't really gone far in our conversation when Professor Dogra received a phone call from Raj Bhavan telling them to return back immediately to the

Raj Bhavan. This information came as a bolt from the blue. We knew, indeed we were prepared, that this news would now come anytime. Yet, we were paralysed.

“Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah was no more!”

The news of his demise was not broken to the public instantly as and when it happened. The news would have spread like wild and ferocious fire. There was grave apprehension that due to their distress and anguish over his death, people could do anything. A flood of people could proceed towards his residence and besides damaging it, they could destroy everything in their path. There was a deep fear too, that the people might remove Sheikh Sahib's personal effects including clothes as tokens of his cherished memory.

The news of his death was, therefore, announced late in the night. In the meantime his body was removed to and kept in state at the Polo Ground Park, not very far from his residence.



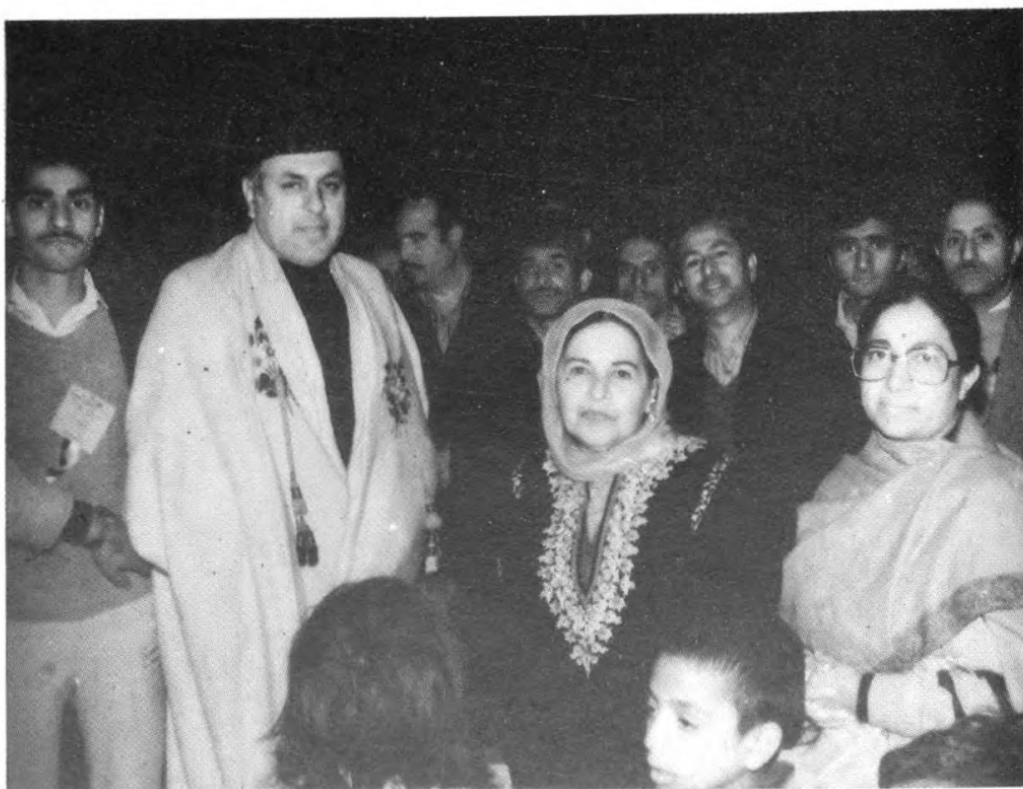
With President Giani Zail Singh at Rashtrapati Bhawan in September 1983.



Mrs Wakhlu discussing Jammu and Kashmir affairs with the West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu in October 1985.



The author with the sacred "Kalash" of the mortal remains of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984.



Mrs Wakhlu with Dr Farooq and Begam Abdüllah in 1983.

Chapter 14

Farooq as Chief Minister

WITHIN a few hours of Sheikh's death Dr. Farooq Abdullah was sworn-in as Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir. His name for the leadership of the legislature party was proposed by Mohi-ud-din Shah, who was General Secretary of the National Conference at the time. Hakim Habib Ullah had then seconded the proposal and Farooq was declared elected as the leader, whom the Governor called upon to head the new government.

On this occasion Farooq made a forceful speech and addressing his colleagues in the party sought to get full cooperation and support from them. He emphasized the need for giving up the path of confrontation and instead develop a constructive and progressive approach and team work. Also, he pointed to the urgency of cementing stronger and better relations with the rest of the country. He warned the people against taking any steps that could lead to the weakening of the bond between Jammu & Kashmir and the other states of India. Kashmir is a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity and it is this uniqueness that we must seek to cultivate for our development. At the end of his speech he declared: "We must take an oath that we shall strive hard to keep going on the path shown to us by Baba-i-Quom (Father of Nation), Sheikh Sahib. We must further resolve that we shall never let the torch lit by him to be put out."

Farooq highlighted the work done by his father for the people of Kashmir and paid rich tribute to him in beautiful and loving words. The people present stood in silence for two minutes to pay their homage to the departed leader. Thereafter, he spoke to the people of the State on radio and television. He appealed to the people for giving him the same amount of co-operation, love and support as they had given to his deceased father. He emphasized

the need for maintaining the secular traditions of the state by saying that Jammu & Kashmir shone like the crown of India by virtue of its communal harmony and peace. He reminded people that it was here in Kashmir that Gandhiji had seen the undimmed ray of light when holocaust had overtaken the subcontinent.

"We have to keep alive this light and even strive to make it brighter. We shall never compromise with those principles and values given to us by Sheikh Sahib", he said.

This speech by Farooq, soon after he became Chief Minister, was liked by people and invited good comments. The words poured out with a certain amount of compassion and innocence. People expected him to act in tune with his words. In fact, Farooq succeeded in reviving the prototype of his father's bold and visionary image established by him in 1947. People of all creeds, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Hindus were unanimous in showering their love and praises on Dr. Farooq. That was the refrain on every lip. In the typical Kashmiri hyperbole people did indeed declare: "If father was like ordinary sugar, the son is as good as refined sugar."

The last journey of Sheikh Sahib's mortal body was being arranged with meticulous attention to detail. Giani Zail Singh, President of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, and other top ranking leaders and officials had already arrived in Srinagar to take part in the last rites of Sheikh's funeral procession and burial service.

The valley of Kashmir was a sea of sadness. In particular, the city of Srinagar was full of mourning crowds of people jostling their way past Sheikh's body for a last darshan of the leader. A sea of people congregated in the city from every direction, coming from the hilltops and from every conceivable nook and corner of the valley. People were crying, wailing, and beating their breasts, paying their last tribute to the departed leader and expressing their profound grief. Thousands of youth were in the procession wailing and remembering Baba-i-Quom.

Hindu populace paid its religious tribute with processionists shouting "Har Har Mahadev", proclaiming the inevitable supremacy of God over human affairs.

The people belonging to the Sikh faith were also in the throngs, raising the slogan "Jo bole so nihal, Sat Shri Akal" (proclaiming the three aspects of God viz. True, Beautiful, Eternal). And all the slogans mingled with the resounding prayers of the Muslim crowds who chanted: "La-il-la-ill-lal-lah"! in praise of the unique and the only, Allah, the merciful, and benevolent.

The skies resounded with these sounds and seemed to be bursting forth as if in an uproarious thunder.

Piercing through innumerable processions en route, I was able to come by car only upto a point. Then I walked a considerable distance, before I reached and embraced Begum Abdullah at her residence, crying out aloud. My grief poured out as an uncontrollable wail of tears. "Papa is no more." "My 'Sartaj' (glorious husband) has gone and left me forlorn. Father of the people (Bab) has gone leaving us helpless", Begum Sahiba said shedding a flood of tears. I urged Begum Abdullah to be strong. Now the people needed her. I urged the Begum to be strong but I felt very weak and began trembling.

"Why did you come here? You have been operated upon recently. You shouldn't have come?", Begum Sahiba said while she patted me on my back.

The room was full of people and I felt suffocated. I came out into the lawns, where G.M. Shah, Dr. Farooq and his other Cabinet colleagues were sitting, under the awning surrounded by people from all walks of life. I went in and sat near Dr. Farooq. Seeing me he said: "You here? My God! You shouldn't have ventured to come here. We don't want to lose you too."

The mortal remains of Sheikh Sahib were carried in a procession from Polo Ground to the Hazratbal Park which began at around 8 a.m. and ended around 7 p.m. He was laid to rest for his eternal sleep in the Hazratbal garden. Close to half a million people participated in the daylong mourning with their grief-stricken faces and eyes swollen by crying. Sheikh Sahib had, during his life time, chosen the site for his burial in the Hazratbal Park on the banks of the Dal Lake. So there was no difficulty in deciding the procedure for burial.

As his body was laid to rest in his grave, twentyone gun salute

was fired. The Prime Minister and the President of India joined with others at the place of burial to pay their last homage to the departed soul. They put flowers and handfuls of clay into the grave with their own hands and then said the last prayer. His body was shrouded with the red flag of the state and the national tricolour.

On this occasion every member of his household, kith and kin, friends, and thousand others were standing around at the spot with sad mournful faces. It seemed that the entire environment of the Dal Lake, the mountains, and the hundreds of chinara trees were participating and sharing in the grief of the people.

As the last rites were over, someone in the crowd suddenly shouted aloud: "He's killed him. He brought him to this pass."

The man was pointing his hand excitedly towards someone. As he shouted these mischievous words there was an uncontrollable turmoil in the crowd. It seemed as though the people would move forward in a great surge leading to a frightening stampede. Perhaps, because of the presence of so many VIPs and dignitaries, the police were somehow able to manage the crowds, while at the same time they quickly whisked away the members of the Sheikh household from the scene. This was done as a matter of precaution. Mrs. Gandhi had come to the burial site in a special "Shikara" boat from the Chashmashahi Guest House, and returned back the same way going across the lake to the other end.

Shah Sahib and Mr. Kochak managed with great difficulty to get away from the burial site by crossing into the engineering college campus from the lake side and then getting into their cars within the campus and move onward towards the city.

An important and momentous chapter of the history of Kashmir thereby came to an end. Those who had contributed their mite to the creation of this saga had one by one made their exit from the scene leaving behind their deep impress on the events of the day. They had been born of dust and unto dust they had returned.

The rivers which had been witness to their deeds, the mountains which had carried a deep impress of their lives, and the trees which had watched the many ups and downs in their struggles,

today they also were remembering their departed friends, the stalwarts of the bygone days. And like the grand chinar trees of Kashmir, the passing away of Sheikh Abdullah was like the sudden uprooting of a massive chinar, leaving behind deep wounds and anguish in innumerable hearts.

The greatest quality of Sheikh Sahib, which I personally experienced, was his simplicity and innocence. He was often exploited and used by many around him because of this unusual quality. He trusted people, and was many times betrayed. Many misused his trust for their selfish ends.

Sheikh Abdullah was very proud of being a Kashmiri. He was not prepared, at any cost, to let there be any compromise on maintaining the unique character of the Kashmiri people, a certain exclusive cultural ethos, he liked to call "Kashmiriat".

He was always visibly delighted when he saw a Kashmiri boy or girl showing promise of doing well in academics, in the professions, or in any walk of life. A boy or girl doing well in a debate, in sports, or in studies would give him the greatest joy. Truly like a proud patriarch, he was often seen equally delighted to talk about, and even exhibit his colleagues, professors, doctors, authors, poets, and intellectuals.

And above all, he was a good Muslim whose secular outlook and belief were unflinching, and proved to be the greatest source of his strength upto his last days.

He was easily angered, but he never hated. His anger would vanish sooner than one would ever think, and once his brow released, he would disarm readily with his broad smile. My colleagues had told me that in his youthful days, Sheikh Sahib was very tough with people, and if he was ever angry with a person, that fellow was in for trouble indeed.

I had, however, found him to be more like a father figure full of love and compassion, who was a beacon light for Kashmiris, a guide, and their beloved leader. All his life he attempted to get the Kashmiris out of the quagmire of poverty, illiteracy and slavery. He taught people the way to an honourable living, and guided them on the middle path between the spiritual-religious and the scientific-modern, the truly secular way of life. He uprooted and

threw away the rotten roots of traditional religions and instead taught the way of living by the unflinching, eternal, and universal values of true spirituality. Throughout his life, he challenged the traditional stranglehold of Mullahs and Maulvis over the common people, and freed them from the web of superstition and ignorance.

Today, Sheikh Abdullah, our leader, Father of the Nation had vanished into the eternal, gone far, far away, for millennia and never to return again, leaving behind only cherished memories for centuries to come.

Mrs. Shoba Nehru met me at my residence on the 19th Sept. Being preoccupied with various problems it was not possible for us to meet sooner. My poor health after Sheikh's demise also forced me to take more rest. After we exchanged some routine formal information, we began to discuss the political developments in the State. She said: "I was quite impressed by the funeral procession on that day. How people loved Sheikh Sahib!" "Many households didn't cook at all that day! Many workers informed me about this," I said. She talked about Dr. Farooq and praised him. "How nice and sweet he is. God bless him. My husband was very much impressed by him. Khemlata, don't you think his being chosen was the best decision? I'm sure he will prove to be taller than his father," she said these words with firm belief.

"There's no doubt about that. He is absolutely secular and modern in his outlook. People love him for these very qualities. Farooq Sahib is quite broad-minded, and untouched by obscure and sectarian ideas," I added. "Everybody—Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs they all identify him as their own," added Mrs. Nehru "These are indeed hallmarks of leadership."

That day I attended a meeting at Mujahid Manzil. Begum Abdullah was also present, and a large gathering of people had come to listen to her speech, her first after Sheikh Sahib's death. She was accompanied by Sheikh Nazir to this party meeting.

Although Farooq was the Chief Minister as well as President of the party after the Sheikh's death, yet it was not favoured in the household that he should run the government and the party independently and entirely on his own. That's why there was constant

pressure on him from people in the household, but more so from Begum Abdullah. She did not wish to see Farooq being used by some novices in the party and made into a puppet in their hands. After all, she had spent a lifetime in close association with Sheikh Sahib through all the political travails, and was therefore, quite familiar with the twists and turns of political affairs. Besides, she also had an overwhelming desire not to remain under the protective umbrella of her son. She had the firm conviction that like her husband in his time, she too would, and ought to receive the same amount of love, respect and prestige as he had received. If he was called the Baba-i-Quom (Father of the Nation), she too was given the title of Madr-i-Meharban (the kind mother) by the people with all their love.

She had another pressing compulsion. This was the problem of struggle within the household. At no cost, did she want the personal family conflicts to become the talk of the town or be raked up by people. She believed that these conflicts could be amicably resolved with understanding and through compromise.

These reasons explain her visit to Mujahid Manzil so soon after her husband's demise. She feared that the proverb, "out of sight is out of mind", may not turn out to be true in her case.

Around these days, a huge rally was organised by the National Conference in the Iqbal Park of Srinagar. The park was fully covered by people. It was an unprecedented congregation of people. All the ministers in the predecessor government of late Sheikh Abdullah also were present on the occasion, and as of that moment continued to be so.

On many earlier occasions Dr. Farooq had told people that he would remove all those Ministers of the Government who had blackened their hands by corruption, black marketing and other underhand deals. For such utterances, people had applauded him with loud cheers, and considered him the true brave son of a lion or even a Sher-i-babar (the grand lion). Amongst Farooq's followers there was mostly a preponderance of the new generation of youth.

To the best of my knowledge, without his consulting anyone

in the party at all, Farooq became highly emotional during his Iqbal Park speech, clenched his fist and raising his hand in the air, he declared: "Right now, at this very moment, I declare that all those corrupt ministers are forthwith dismissed from the cabinet. If I'd my way, I'd drown all those persons in the Dal Lake."

His emotional speech was sufficient to rouse people who made a lot of noise. They were excited. And they were convinced that he would indeed root out corruption from the Government. What his father could not earlier accomplish, he would accomplish that feat now.

And those Ministers were sitting on the dais! As they heard Farooq's words, they were frightened and jittery. They were afraid that people would not even allow them to leave the place, they might lynch them alive! On the one hand, people were happy and excited, but very angry with the Ministers. Publicly they shouted abuses at them. Moments earlier these very Ministers were totally unaware of such a gruesome situation. On the other hand, seated in the pandal, these Ministers were trembling in their pyjamas and fearing that this may be the last day of their lives.

Mr. D.D. Thakur, who was Farooq's friend and well wisher in whom Farooq confided, and above all, who played a key role in putting him on the Chief Minister's pedestal, was today as shabbily treated as his other colleagues in the cabinet. In short, this was the style and manner of dismissal of G.M. Shah and other Ministers from the cabinet. How these Ministers managed to escape from the scene and reach safely home, is another long story.

On October 4, I received a telephone call from the Assembly Secretariat, asking me to see Dr. Farooq in the Assembly Hall immediately. I thought there must be some urgent task to be done.

The session of the Legislative Assembly was going on. I dressed and went straight to the Assembly and into the Chief Minister's room there. Soon after Farooq came in and said: "I've called you in order to assign you an important task. You'll work as a Political Secretary." He said all this in his usual rapid one-breath style. "Where do we perform this task?" I asked.

"In the private office of the Chief Minister. And, there will be two more persons working with you. Dharamvir Singh Oberoi and Sharif-ud-din." He said so while he looked at the M.L.As and some other officers present there. Then he added:

"You get going on the task. Today, just now." I wanted to ask further in this connection but I didn't consider it proper to ask while others were present there. I thought, well, maybe, Dharamvir will give me more details.

The same day, in the evening, Dharamvir and Sharif-ud-din tried to talk to me on the phone. But I couldn't be contacted because I had been attending a dinner hosted by the Governor at the Raj Bhavan.

When I returned home later at night, Sharif-ud-din rang me up again and said: "We are tired looking for you the whole day. Where have you been?" I didn't personally know Sharif Sahib before. He was Farooq's friend, and we had exchanged how do's casually, earlier on, at Farooq's residence. "Had I known, you would call, I'd not have gone out anywhere", I said casually. "Farooq must have already told you about our working together." "Let me know, please, when do we begin?", I asked to find out more. "On the 7th we shall meet at the Chief Minister's Private office, at 10 o'clock sharp. We'll sort out the work schedule and discuss other matters."

We set-up office, after we met on the 7th October, and began our work. Since the work was of a political nature we discussed the strategy and decided on the modus operandi of our work.

I found Dharamvir Oberoi to be a very interesting person. He was an excellent communicator with a good sense of humour. Even Sharif Sahib's association with us added lot of charm to the work we were doing together. We had secular credentials, both internally as well as externally, there being a good facade of Hindu, Muslim, and a Sikh in our exteriors. But it never occurred to me for even a split second that we were a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh. We were human beings full of love and respect for each other. Both of them treated and respected me as a beloved sister, and reciprocally, I didn't consider them anything less than my

own brothers. We would quite often discuss the political issues. Often some of our common friends and political colleagues would join in, and we would thereby receive valuable feedback. This was quite useful for routine execution of our tasks.

On many occasions there was genuine difference of opinion on certain issues between Oberoi and Sharif. They would sometimes attempt to thrust their own opinions on each other, which would lead to hot arguments as well. I always attempted to pacify them and mediate, thus helping the situation to return to normal.

As soon as word went around that we were looking after political affairs and had set-up shop in the private office, people in hundreds thronged there every day bringing with them their problems and grievances. People came from the towns, districts and villages. And there was no end to their problems; many of their grievances had not been redressed for months or even years. They were matters related to land holdings, property disputes, unemployment problems, and admissions to educational institutions. As a consequence our office was flooded with piles of applications made by these aggrieved or favour-seeking people. There were many civil and criminal cases for which decisions were pending for years. Moneylenders, corrupt officials, and other exploiters had been already crushing people for a long time. Courts were full of unresolved and pending petitions; somehow the inordinate delays in the courts were favouring the corrupt and the powerful at the cost of the deserving and aggrieved parties.

Another feature we noticed was that most people were eagerly seeking employment only in Government Departments. One could not imagine how such large numbers could ever be accommodated in the public services. It would not be difficult to deal with ten, one hundred or even a thousand people on this score, but the dimensions of this problem were immense. People would come in throngs every day and the number of job seekers ran into several thousands.

Once we also confronted a very strange but an acutely human problem. A pretty, young married female, 28-30 years of age was torn to shreds having been caught in a mess of her husband's

woes. Hers was a puzzling story. Her husband was a Gujjar and she too belonged to same tribal lot. Around the hills of Kupwara in northern Kashmir, they lived near a village atop a hill. Their home was surrounded by maize fields which they owned. There was a recurring dispute about this land between them and their neighbour in the village. As is the common practice around here, one day the Gujjar husband went away with his flock of sheep and milch cattle into the grazing meadows atop the mountains. While he was away, someone struck behind his back and walked off with his pretty wife along with her little breast suckling baby. The man who had kidnapped this lady had married her and she had borne yet another child by him.

Her first husband had filed a suit against the abductor of his wife and the matter was pending in the court for five years without any proper or substantial hearing having taken place so far. The abductor was a rich man, and was already married to two more women, besides this one.

When I talked to this Gujjar lady and her first husband—who had come to complain to us together—I found that even now she was keen and prepared to go and live with her legal husband. But, she could not admit this publicly because of acute fear of reprisals from her abductor. And yet another complication was evident; she was pregnant yet again!

There were many such cases that came to our attention. People suffered because cases were not decided. This had led to destruction of homes, ruination of careers and even suicide by many people. This was one facet of our present civilization. We also came across many political workers. They would often open their account with a long list of their sacrifices made by going to jail, or by bearing lathi charges from the police, and being externed from their homes for long years. Many would talk about how they had attended meetings and processions for long hours on empty stomach. How often their hearths had not been lit at all or how they had outright turned down the lure of good lucrative offers of Govt. jobs. "And why all this? To what end? Yes, obviously, we wanted to see the spring after the winter. So, we might have respite at long last."

Many political stalwarts would meet us to exhibit their political prowess: the number of people in the area who followed them, the command they have over their colleagues and supporters; and the number of tehsils, districts and villages where they could garner many votes and win elections.

All this was told to us so that we could convey this to Farooq Sahib, and to assist us in rendering proper advice to him on political affairs and personalities. We were made aware of their strength and popularity with the voters which might form the basis for their getting the mandate as a nominee of the party in elections. This was their important target in the political strategy. After meeting us these people would proceed to party headquarters for further interactions.

During the period when Sheikh Sahib was Chief Minister, one of his close and long time political associates namely Mr. Saddar-ud-din Mujahid was assigned the task of Public Relations Officer (PRO) to the Chief Minister. And when we took over as Political Secretaries, Mujahid Sahib was still continuing to hold his post. As more people began to visit our office for their political and other affairs, Mr. Mujahid began to feel left out and rather agitated. He felt threatened as if we had usurped his post and position. He was not mentally prepared for such a changed situation. He was also hurt because he thought he had been replaced by Farooq by appointing us—raw and young novices—for such work, while he had played a key role in political struggle besides suffering long terms of imprisonment.

One day a gentleman approached us in connection with his grievance. His case was hurled from desk to desk in the Secretariat. In the process of chasing his case, he had spent precious years and worn out many shoes. He was in penury because his pension was not paid on account of a petty snag. We had got many such cases very expeditiously settled in a short span of time. With hope, this gentleman had therefore approached us about his case. But his case file was already with Mr. Mujahid.

When he called on Mujahid Sahib to retrieve and get back his case file, he faced the agitated P.R.O. who shouted at him: "What do they think of me? These novices have begun to boast and

dictate to me. I'm not a newcomer to politics. I've spent a whole life time in the game. Sheikh Sahib has not been dead for so long yet. Go and tell them, I'll not release your file. Let them do what they deem fit."

The gentleman and some other witnesses to this outburst came to see us immediately and related to us what had happened.

I was terribly upset by this attitude of Mujahid Sahib. I said to my colleagues: "This is an unfortunate incident. Our objective is to strengthen the hands of Dr. Farooq, and not to get embroiled into controversy. Somehow, we must explain to Saddar-ud-din Mujahid that he is our mentor and senior, and that we won't do anything to hurt him."

I was full of remorse. I didn't wish to see Mr. Mujahid hurt in any way. I held him in high esteem. "You're very strange. He is in the wrong. What are we guilty of?", asked Sharif in a peeved tone. "Our leader has directed us to work here. That's what we're precisely doing. Even if he sends us across the borders for a task we're prepared to go. The fact is that all these people are woefully jealous", said Dharamvir Singh. "All these people? Who're they?", I enquired. "You carry on Lataji, see what all is in the offing. Then you'll understand yourself", said Sharif with a meaningful smile on his face and winking toward Dharamvir.

As time passed, I could see some meaning in these words, and I began to realize that in politics people are hell bent on subduing their rivals and doing so without even batting an eyelid.

Sometime later, I was in Mujahid Manzil. Dr. Farooq also dropped in after a while. As he saw me, he asked: "How's your work going on?" Even before I replied, Sheikh Nazir butted in and said: "But, how can you work on two posts? I think you should stop working in the Private Office", Sheikh Nazir said looking towards me. "What do you mean by two posts?", asked Dr. Farooq for clarification.

"I'm also Provincial Secretary of the Party", I clarified.

"This work can be looked after by someone else. You'll work in the Private office only."

Although these remarks of Farooq brought forth some anxiety on Sheikh Nazir's face, yet he didn't say anything in response. On

that day, also I perceived a turnabout in his attitude towards me. He was no longer at his easy best, as was the case earlier for many years.

I came to know that the justification for this change was created by Saddar-ud-din Mujahid. He had exaggerated the earlier incident, made a mountain of a mole hill and poisoned the ears of not only Sheikh Nazir but also Begum Abdullah, against us. The Sheikh household didn't also take kindly to our working in a political capacity. The reason was that Dr. Farooq had not consulted anyone in the family before assigning us the new task. This was considered unusual.

They also wanted to put a brake on our enhanced political clout. Therefore, everyday a number of workers from the Sheikh household were hovering around our office with one excuse or the other, and indeed working as spies and carrying tales.

Chapter 15

Double Farooq

IN November 1982, Farooq Abdullah took a momentous decision in the political history of the state. This was the creation of unity and understanding between the Awami Action Committee headed by Maulana Mohd. Farooq and the National Conference of which Farooq Abdullah was president. On the one hand, the followers of Maulana Farooq were called "Bakras" because of the role played by his uncle Maulvi Yussuf Shah in 1931 by throwing his lot with the ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, while the people carried out an agitation against him under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah. People who joined the struggle led by the Sheikh were called "Sher". The schism was created more than half a century ago when the struggle against autocracy and exploitation began in the early thirties.

Sheikh Abdullah despised the Maulvis and the priests because of the fact that leading the struggle of the people by him was not to their liking. They were afraid that the mass upsurge against autocracy will also expose them to the people's searching glare and threaten extinction of their centuries old profession whereby they had tremendous influence over the populace. In order to meet the challenge posed by this new wave of revolt they had considered it more desirable to throw in their lot with the Maharaja and the other feudal functionaries of the state. As a result of these developments there was deep seated animosity and resentment against one another amongst the adherents of the two leaders. People were divided into two warring factions. On many occasions in the last fifty years there had been organised violence and group clashes between "Shers" and "Bakras" resulting in lot of loss of lives.

I am reminded of an incident from the past which was related

to me by Mr. Ghulam Mohd. Butt, who was for many years the Vice Chairman of the Auqaf Trust in Kashmir. This has relevance to the role of the priesthood in the life of the people of Kashmir in the twenties of this century.

On one occasion a well respected Maulvi went to attend a special invitation to a feast given by his client. He was accompanied by another one hundred of his sub-priests and assistants, and the purpose was to perform religious prayers (*daroodkhawni*) at the client's house. His retinue of assistants was fairly large which he carried with him everywhere on invitation. It was a symbol of his authority and status. For obvious reasons of high cost of such festivity, it was only the rich and well-off who could obtain his services for special prayers. At the end of the prayers besides paying the Maulvi Sahib, for the services rendered a fee would have to be paid to the hundred assistants as well. From their fees, he was customarily allowed to retain a share for himself as well.

Because the weather was quite hot, when the Maulvi was shown into a room where he would sit and occupy a high seat, he felt like removing his large turban. He did so and stood up to place the turban on the shelf right over the bay of the window. As he tried to place his turban he felt a book under his hand. He removed it and kept it in his hand while he left the turban carefully on the shelf. No sooner had he glanced through the book, he threw it far away as if a scorpion was hiding in it. He signalled his assistants to get up and move away as he himself began moving towards the door in anger.

The hosts were quite upset and perturbed. Firstly, they had been able to requisition his services with great effort, and secondly they had spent quite a lot of money on the lavish feast in their honour. On top of it, the Maulvi was enraged and leaving so soon. They wondered why? They wanted to know if they had committed a fault or any sin. With folded hands they profusely apologized to the Maulvi, and sought to know what had annoyed him. Also they pleaded for forgiveness for any fault on their part. It was only then that the Maulvi opened up and said:

"In any house where there is a book written in English, it's 'Haram' (non-sacred) for me to touch anything not to talk of

having my food or water."

The hosts had taken the cue, and made the priest to stay.

What is most surprising, however, this type of religious "fat-wah" was not applicable to the children of the priesthood who were already being permitted to study English.

Sheikh Abdullah was not amused by these social conditions which he had sought to expose in order to show that all that glittered was not gold.

With this backdrop, the accord between Maulvi Farooq and Dr. Farooq Abdullah had an electrifying impact on the populace. The slogan, "Long live Double Farooq" became a talk of the town, in the streets and bazars of the valley, and particularly in the city of Srinagar. Both the leaders showered praises on the accord. They spoke at public congregations and made solemn promises for maintaining the true spirit of the new understanding in every activity.

The individual flags of the two parties hoisted at many street crossings in the city were removed and replaced by a new flag joining the red flag with the white plough of the National Conference, with the green and white flag with the crescent moon of the Awami Action Committee. The flags were literally stitched together and hung at conspicuous places in large numbers. Some people, who were more naive, placed the white crescent moon on the red patch, and the white plough on the green patch in those new flags. Even more noteworthy was the hanging of large portraits of late Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah on highway crossings and city street junctions throughout the valley. In these pictures Sheikh Sahib was shown with Dr. Farooq and Maulana Farooq on either side of him, with his hands resting on one's head and the other's shoulder. The portrait was meant to convey to the people that the new alliance forged by the youthful leaders had the blessings of Sheikh Abdullah. No doubt, he wasn't alive, but still he could be showering those blessings from heaven, or by way of the fulfilment of his last wish.

A momentous event had taken place, but to be sure, even in this respect, Dr. Farooq had neither consulted anyone in the N.C. nor to my knowledge, taken anybody into confidence. Until the

whole event unfolded publicly the workers of the National Conference were totally unawares. These developments were generally welcomed by the people and generated good feelings. Many decades of strife and animus had ended. Also, people made the pertinent remarks that Farooq Abdullah had indeed achieved what his father could not in his whole life time. All the same the veterans and office bearers in the National Conference were rather apprehensive and anxious. They feared that Maulvi Farooq could wreak vengeance on the party on account of the treatment meted out to his ancestors, and thereby wreck the National Conference from within.

Soon after this event, at a meeting of the Provincial Committee of the National Conference, held at its party headquarters many members alluded to this subject. Whereas some members were in favour of this development, there were many others who viewed the accord with disfavour. They were of the view that this accord with the Awami Action Committee will cost the party dearly. "Sheikh Sahib never put any trust in that party and its leader. Maulvi Farooq wanted to train his gun on Dr. Farooq's shoulders and he has succeeded in doing so. That is precisely how he will wreak vengeance on us."

There was however, a mixed feeling and many people realized that in any case Maulana Farooq's Awami Action Committee was confined mostly to Srinagar city. Besides, the Maulana had some pockets of influence in the towns where he had some religious following via his "murids" (clients), who would invite him on religious and social occasions.

Maulana's party was based on strictly Islamic principles which was diametrically opposed to the secular basis of the National Conference. Also, the National Conference had a large base throughout the State. For the Maulana, therefore, the accord was a very opportune and favourable event in as much as this provided him a golden opportunity to penetrate his men into the ranks of the National Conference and eventually try and grab the leadership of the party himself. In the process he might try and succeed in implanting his own creed and ideology into the National Conference.

What could have been the overriding considerations and pressures for Dr. Farooq to take this momentous step? It could be that he feared the split in his own party, on the one hand, and on the other hand, he apprehended that Awami Action Committee may, in the coming election, lend its support to the Congress-I, which had been the usual practice during many an election before.

In order to neutralize the towering influence of Sheikh Abdullah in the State, it had become a routine for the Congress-I to have an understanding with Maulana Farooq against Sheikh Abdullah. The accord may have been arrived at to put such fears behind. Although Dr. Farooq's relations with the Congress-I appeared cordial, there lurked in his mind feelings of vendetta on account of the hostility of Congress-I towards his father. And in the course of achieving his objectives, Dr. Farooq wanted to remove and clean-sweep all the seeming hurdles.

Maulana Farooq took the best advantage of this opportunity. His party workers went about openly enhancing their clout by getting their things done, in offices, schools, colleges and other Governmental institutions, on special recommendations. They were now part of the ruling elite and had thereby gained access to every government establishment, where they succeeded in increasing the number of their adherents and supporters without any difficulty.

On 5th December, the birth anniversary of Sheikh Abdullah was celebrated throughout the state. Special prayers were offered at the Mazar of Sheikh Sahib at Naseem Bagh. Besides a number of new development works were taken up on this day and foundation stones thereof laid by Dr. Farooq. I went to meet and pay my respects to Begum Abdullah on this occasion. When I met her, I found that she wore a mood of disenchantment. I didn't pay much attention, though, to search for any specific reasons. I believed that such a mood could arise from exhaustion, both physical and emotional.

Two weeks later, on the 20th of December, a meeting of the Executive Committee of the J & K Red Cross Society was held in Srinagar. The meeting was presided over by B.K. Nehru, the Governor of the State and Chairperson of the Society. Begum

Abdullah attended the meeting as Vice-Chairperson and I too was present as a member. The meeting was held in a room in the Nedou's Hotel. All the items on the agenda were covered and the meeting concluded smoothly. After the Executive Committee met, the General Body meeting of the Society was called to order, in the main banquet hall of the Hotel, where all other members of the Society were also present.

During the deliberations in the meeting I got up at one point and gave my suggestions on the topic under discussion. Everyone listened to me with attention. Immediately after I finished speaking, Begum Sahiba rose to speak. Without referring to me by name, she lashed out, giving the impression that the whole world had gone against her. In her outburst she said that she had spent her whole life-time selflessly serving the people and that she could not put up with any accusations against her at this juncture. I watched her speak and was stunned by these words. There was absolutely no cause for such emotion. Even others who were present, were at a loss to make out the purpose of this outcry and against whom it was intended.

Governor B.K. Nehru who was present, was embarrassed and rather taken aback. He kept his diplomatic cool. Even the Honorary Secretary S.K. Kaul was at a loss to figure out the reasons for her angry outburst and obvious hurt. Later, I enquired from the administrator of the Red Cross Mr. Sangeen, if he knew anything about the matter. He too showed complete ignorance.

The meeting was somehow concluded and all the members were invited to share a cup of tea. Begum Sahiba gave some personal reasons and excused herself from the informal gathering of the members, and left.

As tea was served and I was moving towards one corner with my cup of tea, I overheard two persons talking. I turned round and observed Mrs. Aisha Amin talking rather loudly to another lady standing by her side. Mrs. Amin is an officer in the Social Welfare Department, and being a member of the Red Cross as well, she would assist Begum Sahiba in Red Cross work. She said:

"It's good that she was angry. If someone is accused, she can't sit tightlipped and watch silently."

"What kind of accusations?", asked the lady teacher standing by her side.

"The accusation that there has been embezzlement of Red Cross funds. Begum Sahiba is the Chairperson and naturally the accusation is against her", Aisha was saying aloud, in order to convey her words to those present.

"Who has made such accusations? And, against Begum Sahiba in particular?", asked another person standing by her.

"There're many such people", she said.

I felt quite hurt by such remarks against the Begum's person. I didn't even know that there was any hanky-panky with the accounts.

There was no doubt, however, that there were many persons hovering around Begum Abdullah who carried tales and poisoned her ears in order to gain her favours. For this objective they didn't mind finding any number of scape-goats.

Next day, I called on Governor Nehru and conveyed to him my perception on the previous day's events. I made him aware of the fact that many people were quite unhappy because I was made the political secretary, and that this could also be the reason for the Begum's adverse attitude.

I went to meet Begum Abdullah at her residence soon thereafter, but she sent word through her assistant and excused herself from seeing me. The next time I could meet her for a brief while when she left for Jammu for her winter sojourn.

In January 1983, our office in the private secretariat of the Chief Minister was flooded with party workers from all over, seeking their nominations and party mandate for the forthcoming elections to the Legislative Assembly of the State. They would also hover around the party headquarters at Mujahid Manzil as well as the residence of late Sheikh Abdullah. They would try to impress us with their political credentials and highlight the fact that they are the best candidates. Then they would go and see Sheikh Nazir, General Secretary of the party and canvass support in their favour. Such deliberations became more pronounced in the months of February and March. The tempo of canvassing also heightened

with the prospective candidates bringing along with them a large number of their supporters. They would shout slogans in favour of their candidates and move on in small group processions to Mujahid Manzil; thence come to meet us, and finally call at Sheikh Nazir in his nearby residence. The candidates spent their own money for transporting hordes of supporters in a number of buses from their constituencies to Srinagar. The numbers and the volume of slogans was meant to impress the party stalwarts with their respective clout. This kind of activity continued, the prevailing cold weather notwithstanding.

Dr. Farooq is quite fond of helicopters as a mode of personal transport. Wherever he had to go, he would move in a copter. It was not uncommon those days to get to talk to him on urgent matters only at the helipad. During February and March he went on a tour of Kupwara, Baramulla, and Anantnag using a helicopter. He would prefer to commute between Jammu and Srinagar by the same transport. On many formal functions he would straightaway land at the venue of the function, the resulting fast wind causing disruption and fall of the awnings fixed at the site.

On 30th March, 1983, the correspondent of *Probe* magazine came to Srinagar. He wanted to have an interview with Farooq Sahib. Before he did so, he called on us in the private office. He said: "I can't fathom Dr. Farooq's line of action. On the one hand he talks of secularism, and on the other he has joined hands with a fundamentalist and reactionary. Don't you see a contradiction in this approach?"

"The National Conference is a large organisation. Everybody is well conversant with its principles and policies. The achievements made by the party under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah also are not hidden from anyone. In 1947, when Pakistan raided Kashmir, the role of National Conference was outstanding. While the whole sub-continent was afire, we had peace here", I had said in reply.

"It doesn't follow that if we built friendships, we do so at the cost of our principles, or sacrifice them for the purpose. And indeed, it's good to befriend all," said Dharamvir Singh Oberoi.

Thereafter, he interviewed Dr. Farooq, while I was present and

seated there. I was delighted with the interview. All the questions asked were dealt with by Dr. Farooq nicely. He conveyed the impressions of a young, modern, ambitious, and idealistic visionary. It appeared he has had vivid dreams of what he could achieve, and here he was trying to turn those dreams into a reality.

At this juncture, there was also some tension developing on account of the forthcoming elections. Dr. Farooq had to proceed to Delhi. Madam Indira Gandhi was attempting to cement relations between the National Conference and the Congress(I) and prevent the drift between them. She desired that the two parties fight the elections on a common platform because both the parties had put faith in the principles of secularism, democracy, and socialism. These were the very foundation of their respective party programmes. Mrs. Gandhi also rightly believed that she had played an important role in bringing Farooq to the forefront of leadership in the National Conference inspite of the fact that he was quite junior in his party. She assumed therefore that Farooq would be grateful, and happily agree with her request for a joint programme for the elections.

Soon after Dr. Farooq returned from New Delhi, he came straight to Mujahid Manzil and attended the meeting of the Executive Committee of the party. He reported on his deliberations at New Delhi to the members of the Committee: "The people at Delhi want us to fight elections jointly. They want to have five of their candidates in Srinagar and seventeen in Jammu. But I have decided that we will fight it out on our own strength. They too can do likewise. Let's see who stands where."

Before anyone present could express any opinion at all, he had announced his final decision. There was no room for any compromise! There was a mixed response amongst the members present in the meeting. One of us did finally ask:

"Is this the final decision?"

"If it is not final, it shall be so", replied Farooq.

There were many reports in the newspapers to the effect that Farooq had agreed to sharing of Assembly seats with Congress (I) during his meeting with Mrs. Gandhi, but had made a volte face as soon as he returned to the valley. Thereby began yet another

chapter of confrontation between the Centre and the State.

Dr. Farooq did not only play the cat and mice game with political colleagues at Delhi, but acted similarly in respect of his dealings with party colleagues and his close relations and associates as well. I don't know, however, if this approach was part of a deliberate and well planned strategy, or merely a consequence of the traits of ingrained personal behaviour.

In this connection, I am reminded about an important event which is well worth recording here as very relevant. Soon after Dr. Farooq took over as Chief Minister, all the Government offices were to move to Jammu, the winter capital of the State. This practice of shifting the capital was more than a century old. As Dr. Farooq proceeded towards Jammu, he went to the famous cave temple of Vaishnav Devi situated around 50 kilometres from Jammu. It is a cave located on a scenic hill top and is visited every year by more than one and half million people from all over India. From the township of Katra the cave temple is reached on foot, by pony or by helicopter which lands on a helipad nearby the location of the temple.

Dr. Farooq paid a traditional visit to the cave temple and as a mark of the visit had a red scarf tied on his head and a red vermilion mark was put on his forehead for blessings and good grace. From the cave temple he went straight to the Secretariat at Jammu after going in that attire through a couple of streets in the town leading to the Assembly Hall. The people in Jammu were pleased with him, and commented favourably on his winning ways. But his colleagues in the Awami Action Committee and the adherents of the Jamat-i-Islami were quite annoyed with such gestures.

Later he attended a function at the famous Gurudwara Chattipadshahi near the Hari Parbat fort in Srinagar. This Gurudwara is built in honour of the visit of the sixth Sikh Guru to Kashmir. Here too, Dr. Farooq took part in the common prayer with the same reverence as behoved a good Sikh.

When one comes to think of it there should be absolutely no objection to any such religious activity. But in our country there is no dearth of people, who not only tread on wrong path them-

selves, but would also like to bind others with tough chains of narrowmindedness.

Soon thereafter, pamphlets were printed by some organisations against such unIslamic actions of the Chief Minister and widely circulated amongst the students and the youth. These religion-based organisations wanted to take advantage of the opportunity and rally people against Farooq. The posters carried criticism against Dr. Farooq for his actions, and he was warned in no uncertain terms that if he is a Muslim, then he should desist from idol worship; kneeling before the holy Granth Sahib, or any similar unIslamic actions. The leaflets carried also an appeal to the following effect:

“O! believers, you’re ordered that if some enemy attacks your faith then you rise and carry out ‘Jihad’ against the enemy, so that the sanctity of your faith is maintained. The orders of the holy Quran and the Irshad-i-Nabi (PBH) considers the recent actions of Dr. Farooq Abdullah, and his colleagues as disgraceful, which must be highlighted, so that you may act on the orders of God Almighty and His Prophet (PBH) as ordained.”

The leaflet of the Anjuman Behboodi Islam carried at the end such words which point towards the outlines of a struggle for Islam. “We’ll not let him bargain with Islam or its holy principles. If he doesn’t repent on his behaviour publicly, and desists from such actions in the future, then there will be a call for a total struggle against him.”

Chapter 16

Assembly Elections 1983

ELECTIONS to the Legislative Assembly were scheduled in June 1983. There was a lot of haggling in the party over mandates. Farooq wanted that party tickets should not be given to those who were guilty of corruption in the past. He was opposed to those sitting members of the Assembly whom he had publicly criticised or those who had been dismissed by him from the cabinet. Indeed he had told the people in clear terms: "No one will be given the mandate against your wishes. Those who have a good track record shall be given party tickets. We'll give you clean administration and a good system." This reassured the people and they firmly believed that Farooq would indeed improve their lives considerably.

On the other hand, Begum Abdullah and Sheikh Nazir were not inclined to ditch their former loyal colleagues, on whose strength and support Sheikh Abdullah had struggled for 22 years, spending time in jails and away from the mainstream politics. Begum Abdullah considered these people to be the very pillars of the party and she did not think it proper to show them the door at this juncture.

She also didn't want a split in her household over the issue. It was a question of the son on the one hand, and her daughter on the other. In order to keep them well-knit together, there seemed only one way, and that was to have a compromise in giving party mandates to party workers. The former party stalwarts had worked in close association with G.M. Shah, their personal loyalty and friendship being beyond reproach. They were political heavy-weights and in the majority. It would prove rather costly for the interests of the National Conference to lose their support.

Whatever the reasons, however, it was Begum Sahiba, who

emerged victorious in this round of political rope tugging. As against a few new faces among the party nominees, there were a large number of those who had been sitting members of the previous Assembly.

When the names of the party's candidates were to be announced in a special convention held at the Iqbal Park, where people had collected in large numbers, the expectations were high. The people believed that the candidates would be those who would do the people proud.

When Dr. Farooq announced the names, there was lot of turmoil and commotion in the crowd. People shouted: "They are same names! We don't accept them. Promises made to us haven't been kept."

There was so much commotion and disturbances amongst the people that Dr. Farooq and others seated on the high rostrum had to shout back:

"Please sit down. Listen! Sit down. Listen to me."

But these shouts went over the heads of the crowd. The people started moving away. Many took hold of the paper buntings of National Conference flags and tore them to shreds while leaving the park in large groups.

Watching this unprecedented scene, Dr. Farooq addressed his mother, who was also seated at the rostrum, with anger on his face, and tearing the list of candidates into shreds: "Do you see? I'd told you, this would be all wrong", he was furious with rage as he said so.

Begum Sahiba was quite upset and she replied: "There's nothing new in this episode. People will understand our object and calm down."

Hearing these words from his mother, Farooq's anger was aggravated, he got up to move out and in passing he said: "I don't want such leadership. You might as well have it yourself." As he left the place in that angry mood, everyone started homeward thereafter.

Apparently the people accepted the inevitable with some fortitude but they didn't easily forget the episode. The people were firm in their belief that the Begum had pressurized her son and

made him take the wrong political decision in the very first place. As usual, the rumour mills began operating, and many people alleged that Begum Sahiba had collected huge sums from those whom she had got nominated for the election. In fact, it was said, that the sums received varied with the clout and the financial status of the candidates, fatter sums being charged from those who had more clout. Whatever the truth of these allegations and rumours, they made rounds in every household in Kashmir.

Since Dr. Farooq had taken over as Chief Minister his seat in the Parliament had also fallen vacant. Alongwith the Assembly election, therefore, elections were to be held for this seat for the Parliament as well. As a sequel to the accord with Maulvi Farooq, it had been agreed to share some seats with his party. He was given the choice to nominate two persons for the Assembly and one for the parliamentary seat.

The people at the party headquarters were not aware of these agreements and compromises, and this one regarding seat sharing was received with lot of misgivings within the party. Many workers openly expressed themselves to me: "The Awami Action Committee have become our shareholders today. We haven't sacrificed ourselves for nothing. They are riding on us piggy-back and kicking us in the pants too!"

Abdul Rashid Kabuli was nominated as the National Conference candidate for the vacancy in the Parliament. Earlier Kabuli was elected to the State Legislative Assembly on the support of Maulana Farooq's Awami Action Committee. And in his capacity as M.L.A., Kabuli had publicly confronted Sheikh Sahib and accused him of doing many wrongs. Such behaviour on his part had enraged the workers of National Conference to such an extent that they would go to any length to settle scores with Kabuli Sahib. And now, salt was being rubbed into their wounds, and they were asked to accept him as the party candidate for Parliament. Helplessly, they watched and accepted the turnabout with a heavy heart.

Thereupon, began the vehement tirade of Farooq Abdullah against the Centre which he made publicly everywhere. Thereby he killed two birds with one stone. On the one hand he attempted

to seal the mouths of Jamat-i-Islami, and on the other he wanted to proclaim that he wasn't afraid of anybody in his defence of autonomy. He also wanted to impress upon people that he didn't succumb under any pressure, something that was being alluded to him.

He tried to convey home the fact that he was bold enough to take on the Centre, whereas the political minions within the State were no match for him. He attempted to meet the challenge of the Jamat-i-Islami by demonstrating that he too could talk about saving Muslims in the same vein as they did in their political utterances. It was plainly a question of one-upmanship in the vote catching game. And it was election time; winning was very important to him personally. He had to establish his credentials and demonstrate which party vis-a-vis the Congress (I) really had the people's support and political clout.

It was in this scenario that Dr. Farooq broke the ice and began his anti-Centre crusade at a function in the University of Kashmir. On the anniversary of Allama Mohammed Iqbal, the University had organised a seminar on the appreciation of Iqbal's contribution to sub-continental politics. Besides Dr. Farooq Abdullah, the other people present included Shahbuddin, M.P., Prof. Masood Khan, and Prof. Balraj Puri. They had been specially invited to deliberate on the topic. Shahbuddin spoke on the subject with a highly emotional pitch. Many people present wondered whether they were hearing an Indian or a foreigner on the subject. His words were full of communal outbursts and bitterness. It appeared ludicrous that he should be voicing such sentiments in a sensitive border State amongst young students. What could be the academic objective of such speeches?

Dr. Farooq was also triggered to speak in the same emotional frame. And, extempore he said whatever he could with an eye on the audience response. Again he wanted to make it known that he couldn't care less. His followers took the cue and understood his newly evolved strategy. Then there was no going back, and the party workers spoke on the same lines everywhere.

The other political outfits in the valley were not sitting idle. In particular, the Jamat was now quite active along with its student

wing, the Jamat-i-Tulba and were distributing lot of propaganda material amongst the youth. Dr. Farooq's attention was drawn by party workers to these activities but he didn't seem to pay much heed. Every time the subject was broached with him, he gave the impression that people make a mountain of a molehill and there wasn't any threat involved in these activities.

Election rallies, propaganda and processions were in full swing. Wherever one looked, there were buntings and flags galore in rows upon rows. The opposition parties and groups were quite upset to see the growing clout of the National Conference everywhere. They were on the look out for any opportunity to exploit any event or situation at this moment when the iron was getting hot and it was time to strike. They were looking for a religious cause which could trigger off a serious commotion amongst the people.

So it happened. In the month of May the students belonging to the Jamat-i-Tulba raised a hue and cry against the anti-Islamic writings in the book "Islamic Civilization". There was every effort made to rouse people about the sacrilegious writing in the book. Students indulged in acts of rowdyism and stone throwing. The police used tear gas shells to disperse the mobs. In the confrontation which ensued between the police and students, many people were wounded. The people, however, by and large were not taken in by these stratagems. Their love for Sheikh Sahib was still embedded deep in their hearts, and the red flag with white plough, the flag of the National Conference, was very much a part and parcel of their political psyche. In spite of these violent demonstrations by the communal political parties, people kept themselves aloof from their political pressures. The accord between National Conference and the Awami Action Committee made it difficult for the Jamat to influence workers of the Action Committee, and thereby the Jamat's objective wasn't achieved fully or as they had expected.

Many of the senior leaders of the Congress (I) visited the State for electioneering during this period. The secular and progressive parties got unduly locked against each other and were keen to show down and defeat the other in the battle of votes. There were

no holds barred in their desperate struggle. There was a lot of mud slinging and washing of dirty linen in public; the ideals of their parties were forgotten and there was hardly any mention of ways and means to alleviate the miseries of the people. Indeed, the parties accused each other of being puppets in the hands of some foreign agencies and powers.

In the country today, it is now a well honed election technique to rouse the passions of the people. This is being done with a high degree of professional finesse. And no wonder, it does not take these professionals much effort to say one thing to the people today, and then take them on to an opposite track sometime later. In the process the so-called leaders have always held back the truth from the people and cheated them in the bargain. I am afraid such exploitation has gone on for too long and might even continue to be so in the future.

People in our country have been grilled in the mill of ignorance, topped with illiteracy, and lack of education. Political leaders are, for that reason, keen to achieve only one objective namely, how to win and retain political power. For that they need to win peoples' votes. In that effort a lot of our ills and deficiencies come to the forefront. Casteism, communalism, regionalism, forward classes and backward classes, rural versus urban population and then even finer divisions within the village between landowners and landless; these are the issues that are fully exploited to cash on vote banks. In this effort groups of people are roused against each other giving rise to violent clashes, arson and breakdown of law and order, and increased turmoil all over. Every party and its political heavyweights have to rely on musclemen and keep such shady characters permanently on their pay rolls. These people are then used on such occasions to create political clout by dubious means. Arranging a "bandh" (closure of shops etc.), or a procession, or letting loose an orgy of violence, loot, and arson; these are the sort of things in which these goons are specially trained. What is most surprising, they are even well protected from the clutches of the police by the patronage they receive from the Ministers in the Government. Nobody dares to harm them, no matter how criminal their acts against the peaceful

citizens.

B.K. Nehru, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, had in the month of May, invited us with other prominent citizens to a party at the Raj Bhavan, Srinagar. K.C. Pant of the Congress (I) was also present on the occasion along with his wife. They were on a visit to Srinagar in connection with the election campaign of the Congress (I). During our conversation, Pantji declared that the prospects of the Congress (I) in the valley were very good. I could not know on what basis he made such a claim. He might have extended his impressions gathered at Jammu to the valley as well. But, then Governor Nehru asked me pointedly:

“What are the chances of your party in the elections?”

“I believe we shall win all the seats in the valley”, I replied.

Somewhat surprised, both Pant and Nehru asked:

“On what basis do you say so?”

“If you assess the mood of the people at large, you’ll realize which way the wind is blowing. Seeing the enthusiasm of the people, it seems absolutely clear that they won’t allow even a single seat to anyone else”. As I said so, I saw Pant feeling rather dismayed. Nehru changed the topic somewhat and asked me:

“You were so important in the National Conference, what happened to that?”

He was referring to party mandate for the elections. I took the cue and replied:

“I have now become less important. And those who were nonentities thus far have become important by penetrating into our ranks.” (I spoke in Hindi and there was pun in my words.)

Thereupon, Nehru laughed loudly and Pantji wore a quiet smile on his face, as we all sipped cold drinks in this pleasant cocktail party hosted by the Nehrus.

Later I was engrossed in the electioneering work for the party’s candidates namely Abdul Samad Teli, who was a candidate for Nigeen constituency bordering the Dal Lake; Ali Mohd. Sagar, Mubarak Gul, G.M. Bhat, Sheikh Rashid, Hissam-ud-din Bandey, and Mohi-ud-din Shah. It was uppermost in my mind that the National Conference should win with a sweeping and

positive vote so that we could usher in a new era in the political life of the State by putting an end to the difficulties and problems of the people. We wanted to see the Kashmir of our dreams come into being.

Along with the elections to the Legislative Assembly, there was a bye-election for the parliamentary seat from Srinagar which was vacated by Farooq Abdullah when he took over as Chief Minister. The National Conference had fielded Abdul Rashid Kabuli for this seat. He was an active politician in the erstwhile Awami Action Committee which was now united with National Conference. Kabuli had brought along with him the mind-set and fundamentalist outlook of a narrow sectarian type from his previous role. He was thereby able to dilute and eradicate the secular credentials of the National Conference and sow the seeds of hatred amongst different communities.

One day when I went for electioneering work in the constituency of Mubarak Gul, I found Rashid Kabuli already present at the venue of a public meeting in Nawab Bazar Chowk. The chowk was filled with people. There was a stage on one side of the street on which were seated the senior leaders of the party. There was a series of lectures by many people. I was getting restive and said to Mubarak Gul: "I have to attend many other meetings today. I would like to be free sooner, please."

In reply to my request both Kabuli and Mubarak said in a low voice: "If you leave this gathering the people will also thin out. Therefore, you will have to stay on till the end of the meeting." Thereafter, when some of the local leaders finished their speeches, Rashid Kabuli rose to address the congregation. From the beginning to the end of his speech he sang the same tune, and described how Muslims were being massacred and killed in the country. He described the details about how children, boys, and girls were brutally killed and thrown to the wolves. Then he reflected on the holocaust at Muradabad and then on to Meerut where, he said, women were raped and thousands of people rendered homeless. He went on to explain to the people how Islam and Muslims can be saved, and how he will rip the curtains in the Hindu dominated parliament of the country.

With a speech of such hateful tenor impinging on my ears, I felt a bitter taste in my mouth. I could also see the response on the faces of our workers who were sitting very close to the stage. They were alternately looking at me and then at the floor, rather embarrassed, and clearly, silently communicating these words: "What new philosophy is this man bringing into our ranks?"

It was my turn to speak after Kabuli. I was in a predicament. I didn't know from which end I should begin to put the beads back into the dismembered rosary. Never before had I faced such a difficult situation while addressing the people.

As I rose to speak, however, the people sitting close to the dais cheered lustily, and amidst these resounding cheers I shouted the slogan: "Long live Sher-i-Kashmir". The audience were instantaneously enthused. Those who were lamenting over the tragedies occurring in the country until now, were suddenly awakened. Seeing their positive response, I shouted another slogan: "We'll win: We'll win: National Conference will win." These slogans helped the audience to come out of the earlier mind-set. Now they seemed eager to listen to my speech. I began:

"Why do we have these massacres? Why this rioting, every now and then? Why do people of one community go after the blood of their neighbours from another community? Why are people thirsting for each other's blood? The one and only one reason for this is the prevalence of economic imbalance in the society. If we have enough for all, enough to eat, and enough to wear, then where's the problem? The communal clashes do not happen only between Hindus and Muslims. Even a Hindu goes after the life of another neighbour who may also be a Hindu. Sometimes it is rural folk fighting the urban people. And on other occasions, it is the backward classes fighting the forward classes. Were it a problem only of religion, then why should Iran and Iraq be fighting amongst themselves? They should have been leading happy and relaxed lives. Don't you see that such problems arise only in our underdeveloped countries? There are no such problems in USA and United Kingdom and other developed countries. They have enough of everything for themselves, and even something to spare for us. That is the reason why people from our

country move out for gainful employment to remote corners of these developed countries. If this were a question of religion, then we could find no place in these mostly Christian lands. Recently a worst kind of tragedy has befallen the Harijans in Bihar. It is worse than the tragedy of Muradabad. So why is a Hindu killing another Hindu? It is essentially a problem of overpopulation and scarcity.

Therefore, unless the country becomes strong industrially and economically, we shall be facing these problems. We have to see the genesis of these problems and understand the reasons so that we take appropriate action to solve them, and eradicate them."

Thereafter, I spoke to them about the good work done by the National Conference over the last half a century, and asked the people to make the National Conference candidates win in the elections.

That night I couldn't sleep at home. The shape of things in the National Conference was going through a subtle and rapid transformation for the worse, and the structure built by Sheikh Sahib was being dismantled by the termites within. Nobody seemed to perceive what damage was being done.

I recollect vividly the speeches that Dr. Farooq made at Bohri Kadal, Safakadal and other places in the downtown areas of Srinagar. He lambasted the Congress (I) in very strong language, and in particular, naming Indira Gandhi and raising fists in the air he said: "That 'fariwajen' (a derogatory term used for a fisherwoman in Kashmiri), we shall teach her a lesson. We will show her what people's power is like". On hearing such words the young people in the audience were excited. They danced and shouted slogans: "Long live Double Farooq!"

It was even more shocking to see Shafi Shaida, who had spent umpteen years as a member of the Congress (I), and who had recently joined the National Conference, condemn the politics, policies and personalities of the Congress (I) in the strongest possible words from the same platform. One cannot imagine what ridiculous accusations he made publicly against his former party.

In general, I have observed that politicians with no program-

mes and proper credentials usually have recourse to inciting people on communal lines and they enjoy this game. Be it Kashmir or Kerala, this stratagem is used for winning the people's votes.

I have also observed that those who had been members of the Legislative Assembly, and who had been associated for sometime with Sheikh Abdullah, have developed polite and polished speech, free from the stink of communalism. They had been schooled in the politics of secularism, and whatever their personal religion, they had a sound belief in and respect for other faiths as well. This was the result of the personal example of Sheikh Sahib himself, who always urged us to live together, work together and progress in unison.

There is another important point that is noticeable in Kashmir. It is a fact that a Muslim can offer his life for a Hindu; and similarly a Hindu can sacrifice his life for a Muslim. I have personally seen many examples of such behaviour. History is also witness to the fact that on many critical junctures of turmoil, the Muslim population has risked its life and all to save their Hindu brethren from tragic consequences, and vice-versa.

Indeed, ours is a common blood line; a common culture is what we carry in our very blood and veins; we speak one language; our living and daily lifestyles are similar. We celebrate our births, our marriages, and our customary festivals with the same affluence of new clothes, good food, visit to shrines and holy places and other unique customs, all our very own. We even mourn our dead similarly!

The shoddy political process is therefore like putting a strong dose of acid into a pot of boiling milk. Everything disintegrates.

Abdul Samad Teli was the N.C. candidate for the Nigeen constituency. One of these electioneering days he organised a procession of women marching on foot within the constituency. I was asked to lead the procession by being in its vanguard. People were excited and enthused and they raised loud slogans which rent the air. "Long live Sheikh Abdullah! and Long live Farooq Abdul-

lah!" These slogans had transformed the whole environment. There was only one opponent in front of us and that was the Congress (I), and to defeat the party in the elections had become our primary objective.

It is a strange paradox, at the same time somewhat surprising, that the people in Kashmir have had a benign respect for the Indian National Congress, even while they hated the Congress in the State. The people have always had excellent relations and rapport with the Congressmen at the Centre, but the leaders of the National Conference were suspecting that the leaders of the Congress (I) in the State carry tales to their bosses at the Centre and thereby attempt to project a distorted picture of the political scenario in the valley. That explains why the State Congress (I) had become a chosen target for attacks with so much venom being poured out against them every now and then.

There is yet another fact that I recall. At the time of election of the President of India, it was Sheikh Abdullah who had himself cast the first ballot in favour of Giani Zail Singh with great and obvious enthusiasm. He was a candidate of the Congress (I) and Indira Gandhi was keen that he should be elected. This close relationship was in direct contrast to Sheikh's relationship with the State Congress (I) leaders at the same time.

At the time of elections no holds are barred for the contesting parties. Politicians use all means, fair and foul, to incite the people. And quite often, the limits of decency and civil behaviour are crossed. However, it has been my observation on many such occasions that the stalwarts of the National Conference—who had worked for long years under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah—would always earnestly attempt to maintain balance, not allowing the foundations of decency, ethical norms and mutual trust and brotherhood to be shaken by any emotional outbursts. Thereby they would protect the prestige and credibility of the National Conference.

As our procession wended its way past the home of G.M.Bawan, the candidate of the Congress (I) from this constituency, the women started shouting accusations against him. They informed him in clear and loud words that they would not allow

him to win the election.

Bawan Sahib was formerly a member of the National Conference. And when in 1975 Sheikh Sahib got back the reins of government, Bawan was appointed Administrator of the Srinagar Municipality. In this assignment, Bawan Sahib did very good work for improving the civic amenities in the city of Srinagar. Roads were improved and street lighting received a total facelift. He created new ethos of work and considerable hope for speedy change and improvement in the city's infrastructure was generated.

Bawan Sahib had been a young, successful and well educated advocate. His family had also been in the forefront of struggle of the people under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah; they too had gone through and suffered many vicissitudes along with him. In 1977, however, when elections were held to the State Legislative Assembly, Bawan was not given the party mandate and he had left the party and fought against the party nominee. Ever since that time he had been fighting elections against the N.C. candidates.

Chapter 17

The Naked Dance

IN early 1983 Indira Gandhi came to Srinagar to address election rallies of the Congress (I). The Iqbal Park in Srinagar was jam-packed with people who had come to participate in this rally. After speeches were made by the State leaders, Madam Gandhi rose to speak. As she began, she was somewhat taken aback by what she saw. Looking straight ahead across the pandal she had seen some young men with their trousers removed. They faced her stark naked. Unruffled she, however, continued with her speech. She had then said: "There is such stark poverty here that there are people who haven't even enough to wear. That is why some of them are going about stark naked."

The youth had been promptly removed from the scene by the State police. Mrs. Gandhi had, however, taken this insult too personally. She had felt deeply hurt and for all this she held Dr. Farooq personally responsible.

I too had expressed my views on this episode to my colleagues at Mujahid Manzil. This situation had personally hurt me. If this kind of vulgar exhibition could happen before the Prime Minister of the country what was the guarantee that worse could not befall the rest of us? I had wondered why people give up their good sense and behave in such manner! I was pained while reflecting over these issues.

Very soon this sad event was talk of the town, indeed of every household. People were annoyed and angry over the misbehaviour of the youth. I met a lot of people at the N.C. party office and everyone without exception felt deeply ashamed about this happening. They were unanimous in their opinion and said: "This is the work of 'bakras' (the nickname for the followers of Maulana Farooq of the Awami Action Committee)."

"Our workers of N.C. can never stoop to such mean levels. And nobody is going to allow them to indulge in such derogatory actions."

"If this were the creed of the N.C., then couldn't we have done worse in the twentytwo years of our struggle? (referring to the estrangement with the Centre from 1953 to 1975). If Sheikh Sahib were alive today, wouldn't he have put such people to the gallows?"

"There can be differences of viewpoints on political issues. That doesn't ordain us to behave like savages. Political differences can be resolved politically." These were the opinions expressed in conversation by nominees for the Assembly and Block Presidents of the N.C.

"She is the Prime Minister and on top of it she is a woman. And such vulgar behaviour! If she wasn't spared today, what will be their behaviour with us tomorrow," I said with great sadness in my heart.

The National Conference won all but three assembly seats in the Kashmir valley. The Congress (I) captured twenty-six seats. As the election results started pouring in there was a wave of jubilation and happiness everywhere. People danced and sang enthusiastically in the streets. Women sang the typical Kashmiri "wanwun" (group songs) all over the places. A massive group of women singing aloud landed in my home, their voices echoing in the air.

The mood of celebration continued for a while. A colourful river procession was also organized starting from the upstream end of River Jhelum near the State guest house. Hundreds of decorated "shikaras" (Kashmiri boats) were collected for seating party leaders and workers, and forming into rows along and across the stream. In the melee P.L. Handoo who was a Cabinet Minister now and Ali Mohd. Yatoo the Speaker of the Assembly fell into the river while boarding the shikara and were drenched from top to toe. Such was the excitement that many more people slipped on the slippery banks and fell into water. There was a

scramble for seats at vantage points; everybody wanted to be in the procession of boats. And the newly appointed Ministers of the Cabinet were making every effort to seat themselves close to Dr. Farooq for every spectator to witness their political clout. People ought to get the message about how close a Minister was to the boss, and how Dr. Farooq depended on him for advice, not taking a step without consulting him. Naturally, there was this melee and the danger that many more might get into water. The procession went down the river through the many bridges en route. People lustily cheered the Chief Minister Farooq and his mother Begum Sahiba from both banks of the river and from the windows of the houses situated there. Huge doonga boats and carrier boats had been anchored midstream with decorative arches raised thereupon throughout the length of the river upto the end of Srinagar city. Thousands of people watched the procession from atop the many bridges and showered flowers on the leaders. Another memorable day in the life of the people was over. The National Conference had come of age under the new leader, so it seemed. Indeed that was the message that the National Conference under Dr. Farooq wanted to send across to all those who ought to know.

In the J & K Assembly there are two seats reserved for women. These seats are filled by nomination. Under this provision the Governor of the State B.K.Nehru was pleased to nominate me, and Gurbachan Kumari Rana, of Jammu against the two reserved seats as Members of the Legislative Assembly. Gurbachan Rana was indeed a candidate of the N.C. during the election for a reserved seat in Jammu region but she had lost against the Congress(I) candidate.

Before this, while I was still working as political secretary along with Sharif-ud-din and D.V. Singh Oberoi in the Chief Minister's Private Office, one day Dharamvir had said to me:

"You see, Lataji, you're being made MLA under the category of Women's nominated seat. I'm being given a berth in the Upper House (Legislative Council) and being made a Minister in the Cabinet."

"Who has informed you about all this?" I had asked.

“Why? Dr. Farooq himself told me. And, of course, I do represent my community too. At least one Sikh has got to be accommodated in the cabinet”, said Dharamvir.

“I’ve worked a lot amongst people. And I firmly believed that I would be given a nomination from the Habba Kadal constituency”, I said slowly with a pause, somewhat in a reflective mood.

“Even so, you would be an MLA only. It does not make any difference so far as you are concerned. And of course, you shall have ample contact with the people”, said Oberoi. “What about Sharif Sahib? He hasn’t been nominated for an Assembly seat from Shrakwara. This is pretty bad. He’s heart broken. After all, he’s an educated, deserving young man”, I commented.

“Dr. Farooq wanted to put up young and educated people for the Assembly. You know about Begum Sahiba, nothing moves without her consent and approval”, Dharamvir said.

In the meanwhile, Sharif-ud-din entered the room accompanied by two other young men. As he entered, he said: “I’m not feeling comfortable here at all. That’s why I was sitting there in the coffee house. These people accompanied me upto here”, said Sharif while pointing to the two young men with him.

“Come on, what news have you got from the coffee house?”, I enquired from the two youths.

“Well, what news? People say the National Conference is doomed!”, said one of them. I forget his name.

“N.C. will be doomed? What do you mean?”, I asked with a lot of curiosity.

“Yeah! People are hell bent to destroy your party.”

“Who’re these people?”

“Begum Sahiba has tied down her son completely”, said the other youth.

Thereupon I didn’t make any further probes. I was not prepared to hear any more such utterances. Finally, when we won the election, and soon after I was also sworn in as an MLA, I went to meet Begum Abdullah at her residence to convey my felicitations on the success of the party.

She received me warmly and was very cordial. Sadiq Ali, of the National Conference, and a Member of the Legislative Coun-

cil, was also present there. We warmed up and talked about the election campaign. "Mrs. Gandhi turned the election campaign into communal lines. It didn't behove the Prime Minister to do so", said Sadiq Ali.

"Our own candidates didn't also sit idly. They matched the performance equally," I said.

"Well, well, she is the Prime Minister of such a great country. Had you heard speeches yourself, you would have hung your head in shame," said Sadiq Ali—who besides being a young man, was rather emotional, and a firm believer in the fundamental approach to Islam.

"Many such things do happen during elections. Soon after, gradually, situations come to normal. Oh yes, Lataji, heartiest felicitations to you", Begum Sahiba said intervening in the conversation.

"Your nomination as an MLA would have been a slap on Mrs. Gandhi's face. She had labelled us as Pakistanis. Hadn't she?" There was a tinge of bitterness and hate in the words of Sadiq Ali.

"Yes, all this has been going on. What nonsense have we heard? Their henchmen are not sitting idly here", Begum Abdullah said.

"Now the 'Delhiwallas' (referring to the party in power at the Centre) would have known who the politicians are enjoying the support of the people. They were bragging a lot," Sadiq Ali said excitedly.

"Not once, but many times they have witnessed, what people want, and with whom they are", I replied.

I had talked to Sadiq Ali many times before, quite frankly and forthrightly. I also knew that he had firm belief in fundamentalist approach to Islam. Every now and then, while discussing present-day politics, he would cite many examples and anecdotes from the Islamic faith.

He would also often end his discussion with the following words: "In our Islam every subject under the sun has been defined and discussed. There are guidelines and rules prescribed for problems from our ordinary day to day life upto the most serious and

intricate subjects.”

Such an attitude and outlook had lately become common amongst many young people. They would cite examples from Islam, as well as buttress their arguments with the support of religious doctrine. Also, they would often establish the veracity of their statements by referring to religious sanctions. They often used sentences like “This is not allowed in our Islam” or “Doing this act is ‘sawab’ (good act) in our Islam.”

Chapter 18

Strained Relations

ELECTIONS were won, no doubt, but the disaffection between Delhi and Srinagar arisen as a consequence, had not yet dissipated. In order to widen the chasm between the two, many people, on either side, had played a part in stoking the fires and keeping them on. There were many in the National Conference, however, who were not in favour of keeping relations strained. They were keen to forget the past and move on to a path of reconciliation. It was realized by these people that development and progress could happen only in a climate of goodwill, mutual confidence, and compromise. The path of confrontation has always been found to be full of suffering and impediments in the path of progress. And what had so far been achieved through a policy of confrontation? Only unemployment and apprehensions in the minds of the people. In the minds of these political stalwarts there was always one big question mark—"Why did we lose and waste twentytwo years for nothing?"

Sheikh Rashid called on me at my house one day. We were deeply concerned and anxious about the growing stalemate in the relations between New Delhi and Srinagar. We were anxious to find ways and means to bridge the chasm, and help bring people closer. How long could we continue on the path of confrontation?

"We must do something, Lataji, to bridge this gap. If you're a well-wisher of the party then we must turn this situation around into one of friendship and accord", Sheikh Rashid told me. Being Sheikh Sahib's nephew Rashid had grown up with his politics from his childhood. He had much experience of similar situations in the past.

"If you deem it proper, we might together meet the State Governor. I do want too, that both of us meet Madam Gandhi. We

should frankly speak to her on the situation", Sheikh Rashid said.

"Madam Gandhi has been badly let down. Elections will always go on, but should people stoop so low?", I said rather reflectively.

"Yes, it was bad indeed. This was the mischief of those who wanted to malign us after sneaking into our ranks. They're hell bent on their nefarious designs. They want to fire their guns over Dr. Farooq's shoulders", Rashid said, referring to the activities of Maulana Farooq of the Action Committee.

"Well, we can't help what has already gone wrong. Now it's upto us to straighten out matters", I said.

On 27th June, a few days before the election results were declared, Sheikh Rashid and myself called on Governor B.K. Nehru at the Raj Bhavan. We mentioned to him categorically that the National Conference did not believe in taking anti-Centre postures which would only be an impediment to the development of the state. And we very much wished to see an environment of goodwill and friendliness flourishing again so that the people could take bigger strides in respect of constructive development activity.

Governor Nehru's talks with us clearly confirmed our belief that his own mind was thinking on the same lines. He did however mention in passing, that some of the statements issued by Dr. Farooq, every now and then, during that period, led to the creation of tension. He warned that such outbursts only enhance the tension rather than mitigate it. We were satisfied and reassured by this frank exchange of views. As we came out of the Raj Bhavan, Sheikh Rashid said: "Dr. Farooq hasn't grown. He should take every step carefully. How long can we go on like this?"

"Why don't you advise him? He is your cousin after all, and perhaps will listen to you?", I replied.

"He doesn't listen to anyone", Rashid said.

"Not even to his mother?", I enquired with a smile.

"If he didn't listen to her, God knows, what he might have done to spoii matters", Rashid replied with a laugh.

After some time I took my oath of office as a Member of the

Legislative Assembly at a special ceremony held there. My maiden speech in the Assembly was well received by all and I was complimented by my colleagues. Even the members on the opposition benches listened to me attentively. The same evening a special function was organized at the University of Kashmir to which Dr. Farooq Abdullah and all the MLAs were invited. T.N. Kaul, former Ambassador and Foreign Secretary of the Govt. of India was also present. The renowned musician and "santoor" (Kashmiri stringed musical instrument) player, Bhajan Sopori was invited to play on the instrument before the audience. Towards the end of the function, when the guests were having tea, Dr. Farooq moved around meeting everyone. As he came near our table he met my husband and said:

"You've made Khem Lataji rehearse her speech well. She delivered a powerful speech in the Assembly today. She gave the Congressmen a good rebuff."

We smiled, while he pointed to T.N. Kaul who was accompanying him and said:

"You know him?"

"No", I said.

"He's T.N. Kaul. A Kashmiri Pandit. It is impossible that he does not know another Kashmiri Pandit!" Farooq said with obvious astonishment.

"Really, I don't know him personally. Of course, he is famous."

"Kaul Sahib, she's Khem Lata Wakhlu, our new legislator", he introduced us.

Then we talked together for a while over music and culture of Kashmir.

On 22nd August, it was the opening ceremony of the Annual Industrial Exhibition of the State. Dr. Farooq delivered the inaugural speech on the occasion. It was an appropriately worded extempore speech which was conciliatory in tone and projected the secular democratic vision for the future of the State. I got the happy feeling that there was good hope now for mending of fences with the Congress (I) leadership at the Centre. A number of

National Conference partymen were also present at the function and I vividly remember that most of them were happy to perceive this change of mood in their leader.

Governor Nehru called me to Raj Bhavan at this time and asked me about the political situation in the party. I gave him a detailed account and got the impression that he was convinced by my arguments about the new stance of our party. In fact, I offered to write to the Prime Minister in this regard and do whatever little I could to secure the positive trends. Nehruji agreed to my suggestion and arranged to send my letter to the Prime Minister via the Raj Bhavan mail bag.

I delivered the letter personally to the Nehrus and I also expressed my desire to meet the Prime Minister in order to explain to her the situation in the state.

"Yes, of course. You may do so. You will get an interview readily. For one, she'll be happy to meet a lady, and besides you're Kashmiris", Nehruji said.

"Kashmiris?", I asked with curiosity.

"Yes, she has a soft corner for Kashmiris. Your words will carry a lot of weight", he said.

Next day I called on Dr. Farooq. I briefed him fully on my conversation with Nehruji, and mentioned about my plans to visit Delhi for a meeting with the Prime Minister. He was quite pleased with what I told him and he asked:

"When are you going?"

"In a couple of days. Rashid Sahib will be going with me", I said.

"Rashid Sahib?" What does he have to do there? You may please go alone. And, you take your travelling expenses etc. from here," he said. He was sitting alone in his lawn and having his lunch.

"How long can we bear this tension? The local Congress (I) is hell bent on making the chasm wider", I said.

"Tell Mrs. Gandhi very frankly that the local Congress (I) is causing all the troubles." Farooq said in an angry tone.

"Much happened during the elections."

He interrupted me abruptly and said:

"Do you know how extensively Mrs. Gandhi delivered speeches in Jammu with communal overtones? Whoever speaks against her, she dubs him a Pakistani", Farooq was red with rage and visibly upset while saying so.

"We have to bury the past, and move towards a new phase. Therein lies the good of the state and its people", I said in a pacifying tone.

"That's precisely why I'm sending you to Delhi", Farooq replied with a smile. As he said so, I also had a good laugh.

When I returned home, I didn't have the heart to tell Rashid Sahib that Farooq was not in favour of his going to Delhi. On the contrary, I felt that both of us ought to proceed together to Delhi. After all, he was as much answerable as I was, and both of us were equally keen to see an end to the prevailing stalemate. So I had even got the arrangements for the tickets etc. lined up for two of us.

A few days before our departure, however, Sheikh Rashid, a cane in hand and walking slowly, dropped in at my house and said: "I'll not be able to travel to Delhi. I have had a slipdisc. I couldn't have a wink of sleep for the whole night. I'm having acute pain". He wore a corset around his waist and was limping.

"Why did you bother to come all the way? You could have called me. Are you sure, you won't make it? Shall I get your ticket cancelled in that case?", I asked, to make sure that his decision was final.

"What else can you do? I didn't want to speak to you on telephone. You never know. There are as many foes and friends all around. And this is a secret, and must remain so", he said in one breath.

Sheikh Rashid is a nice, polite and likeable gentleman. He is quite tall and in this he resembles late Sheikh Sahib, his uncle. I have strongly perceived that Sheikh Rashid also considers himself as an inheritor of the legacy of Sheikh Abdullah's leadership. On many occasions during our conversations, he had conveyed to me how he had fought side by side with Sheikh Sahib in the long and

difficult political battles. Sheikh Rashid had suffered many a beating at the hands of the police, and he had been a particular target during the period when Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed was the Prime Minister of the State. He was always kept under strong vigil. Sheikh Rashid's temperament is good and he has a friendly disposition. He had once narrated to me an interesting anecdote from his varied political experiences. These were his words:

"I was new to politics and was once called upon to address a huge rally. Many leaders of the party were also present at the meeting. These included Sheikh Sahib and Begum Abdullah who were both seated on the dais."

"Was this the first time you had to address a large gathering?" I had asked him.

"Yes, it was during the early days of my experience in politics. As I rose to speak, the people welcomed me with a thunderous applause. The crowd's response made me nervous, and before I could correctly begin my speech with the words "Ladies and gentlemen!" (brothers and sisters in Kashmiri), I said "my dear women" (there is a pun in this sentence. In Kashmiri it could also mean, my dear wives). I don't know if the audience saw the humour in my nervous slip of the tongue, but surely it didn't escape Sheikh Sahib's notice. Before I could proceed any further, he interrupted me, and with a loud laugh he said: "Sheikh Rashid remembers only the wives!"

"The crowd took the hint and roared with laughter. I was embarrassed. Without losing courage, however, I continued with my speech".

"Everybody has the same kind of experience in the beginning", I said.

"In the arena of politics many a time one does get hurt as you go along the way. You get seasoned, however, learning the paces as time goes on", Sheikh Rashid had said.

I had been to his home many times and had a glimpse of his private life as well. He had married two wives at different times and one of them was younger by many years than the first wife. Both of them lived in the same home with their husband. This

situation had greatly surprised me and aroused my curiosity. The elder wife is plain, simple, old fashioned and wise. And the younger one is modern, educated, and in tune with the present times. It was quite intriguing to me how the two could carry on under one roof. And Rashid Sahib had told me that the younger one was prone to bouts of temper which sometimes led to some arguments and conflict in the house.

I was well aware that under the Islamic personal law a man could marry more than one wife. All the same, I could never reconcile with this reality, and whenever I visited his home, I had to adjust to this whole set up, which was difficult for me. I often thought: "Why are women treated so shabbily? And, how long are women going to remain subdued and tolerate the indignities inflicted on them by the society through its laws and customs?"

Chapter 19

Failure of Reconciliation

I travelled to New Delhi on 11th September 1983. As I alighted from the plane at the airport, I saw Shri D.D.Thakur on the tarmac. I didn't know he was in the same flight. My husband was also with me, as he had to attend some official work at Delhi.

"What are you doing here?", asked Thakur Sahib.

"I have some official work", replied my husband.

Thakur Sahib had a car waiting to take him home. He offered us a lift and we drove with him home. He invited us for dinner on the 12th September. He was so loving and insistent that we could not refuse or avoid the get-together.

Next day on the 12th of September, I went to meet Madam Indira Gandhi in the Prime Minister's office. Although I had heard that it was very difficult to meet the Prime Minister and indeed many office bearers of her own party had to wait for many days for the purpose, it was my pleasant experience to have been readily granted an interview immediately after I made the request. Earlier I had met P.C. Alexander, her Principal Secretary, in this connection. I didn't know him beforehand but he listened to me patiently while I apprised him about the purpose of my visit. I must admit that Alexander was instrumental in expediting my interview with Madam Gandhi.

As I entered the spacious and aesthetically decorated office of the Prime Minister, Madam Gandhi bid me to sit down. There was an instant rapport between us. It looked as though she knew all about my mission beforehand. "What brings you here?" she asked. Her tone was serious.

"Farooq Sahib has sent me, and he has requested you please to visit Srinagar and meet the people of Kàshmir. They are keenly awaiting your arrival and looking forward to your visit. We shall

be very pleased and grateful", I entreated her.

"They'll be very happy! What more is up their sleeves? They're not satisfied as yet. Who made Farooq the Chief Minister? I have. And look what he has given me in return. He hasn't spared any opportunity to talk against me. What had he talked to the U.S. journalist? Does he think that he can do anything he likes and we won't come to know the details? Irresponsible actions do not go unnoticed? Tell him, that the interview he had granted to the journalist was reported verbatim to us by her. He must realize that we cannot go along with or tolerate his erratic actions." Her words conveyed the feelings of anger and wounded pride.

"Couldn't you forgive him? Farooq is good at heart. A lot of things have happened inadvertently." I had a burning desire to see an end to this conflict but she continued with her harangue.

"He agreed with us on the election issues and back home he made a volte face. And he has been hob-nobbing with the opposition, and is soon holding a conclave with them in Srinagar. This conclave is meant to show us down, browbeat us. They are all hell bent on sinking the ship of this country. And he too is holding their hands and joining company." Her anger had not subsided.

"If the conclave is not held, if by some excuse we avoid its being held at Srinagar, will you please visit Srinagar in that case?" I asked. I don't know, how and why I made this suggestion, nor did I contemplate at that moment the consequences thereof. But, undoubtedly, this utterance of mine brought forth immediate relaxation of tension on Madam Gandhi's face. She wore her typical benign smile and said: "Will he agree? He says one thing and does another. He has been hob-nobbing with anti-social elements too", she was reflective and tense again while she said these words.

"I'll try my best", I replied, while I got up to take leave of her. I passed through R.K. Dhawan's room (he was Private Secretary to the P.M.). Dhawan told me that whenever I would like to meet the Prime Minister in future, I should contact him.

In the evening I went with my husband to visit Shri D.D. Thakur who had invited us for dinner. It was there that I felt very sad to hear more against the pranks of Dr. Farooq. Thakur Sahib

knew Farooq more closely than I did at that time.

"Lataji, please give up your support of Farooq. He says one thing and does something else. He is an unreliable person", Thakur Sahib said.

"You were the one who praised him so much till recently. Then, why this sudden animus?" I enquired.

"Everyone knows about the role I played in making him the Chief Minister. That day, when he uttered such nonsense against us in his speech, he nearly got us killed. Lataji, he is neither reliable nor is he truthful." With these remarks of Thakur Sahib I recollected the words of Madam Gandhi spoken by her that very morning. I listened quietly and didn't speak. I didn't want to say anything about Dr. Farooq. Nor did I reveal to Thakur Sahib that I had met the Prime Minister on that very day.

On September 13, I called on Mrs. Sheila Kaul at her office. She was then Union Minister for Education. My primary intention was to create an atmosphere of understanding and goodwill so that the political climate in Kashmir would become better and harmonious. The moment I said hello to Mrs. Kaul, she came out with her perception about the political scene in Jammu and Kashmir and presented me with a catalogue of complaints. She said: "You see, my late husband did so much work for Kashmir. He transformed gardens and parks so beautifully. Now he is no more. Farooq Sahib had promised to me that he would erect a suitable plaque in his (Prof. Kaul's) honour at the new Chashmashahi garden that he laid out. But, he hasn't done any thing. I'm really upset about it, the manner in which good work done by him is being ignored". Sheilaji looked personally hurt while she said all this to me.

Prof. K.N. Kaul had come as an expert on Gardens and Parks to help the State Government. He did much work to enhance the beauty and grandeur of the gardens in Kashmir. He was known to the people by the pet name of Mamaji which referred to his relationship with Madam Gandhi. And Mrs. Kaul was referring to him in her conversation with me.

"I'll carry this message to Farooq Sahib. And the memorial in honour of Prof. Kaul shall be built." I told her with an air of assurance in my words.

"Precisely, this is what he had himself promised. But there is a lot of difference between making promises and keeping them", Mrs. Kaul said.

On the 14th September, I called on the President of India, Giani Zail Singh Sahib. He was very warm and cordial to me. I mentioned to him the purpose of my visit to Delhi, and told him that I had met the Prime Minister in this behalf a couple of days earlier. In response to my words he said:

"Those people who surround Mrs. Gandhi, day in and day out, they are the ones who poison her ears against Dr. Farooq. Farooq is a good boy. Sometimes he's not able to hold his tongue. He shows immaturity. Sheikh Sahib was a towering leader. Farooq will also learn about the twists and turns of politics and become more mature."

When I informed him that the National Conference was doing well under Farooq's leadership, President Zail Singh responded instantly and said:

"The National Conference has played a historical role. It has led the people in their struggle and raised their stature. I am also personally grateful to Sheikh Sahib. He was the first one to declare his vote in my favour for the President's chair."

Thereafter, I called on L.K. Jha and Mekhla Jha. They were pleased to know about the efforts I had made during the last few days. They were particularly happy about the interview I have had with the Prime Minister. I talked at length with Mrs. Jha about the Social Welfare schemes in the State which she has had a hand in initiating.

On September 15th I returned to Srinagar. And straight from the airport I went to meet Farooq Sahib at his Gupkar Road residence. But he was not at home. So I went to see him later in the evening.

The Congress (I) had organised a large procession in Srinagar on this day. Leaders in the procession had accused the Farooq government for many ills rampant in society. Foremost among

these allegations were those of corruption and maladministration.

It would not be out of place to mention here that gradually the people had also been getting disillusioned with the style of Farooq's functioning. Although he was carrying the mantle of his late father, yet the stature that went with it had begun to diminish. Although he had taken on the responsibilities of high office, yet his approach to his work lacked authenticity and seriousness.

People would lovingly call him "simple hearted", finding in his person traces of a mystic sufi, a "mast kalandar" who doesn't give a damn about worldly affairs. They would see in him the traits of a totally free and autonomous person who would do only what he himself chose to do. It didn't matter even though such bold actions of his may prove rather costly to the public weal. That was the assessment about him made by the people. Sheikh Sahib's fond memories were however still fresh in the people's minds, and they would overlook these glaring faults in Farooq's style forgivingly and dismiss these with the remarks: "He's still young. With time, he'll learn the steps."

The leaders of the State Congress (I) were already eager to take over the government of the State after Sheikh Abdullah's demise. On top of it, whenever they would find the Central Government annoyed with the Chief Minister, they would take the first opportunity to create conditions whereby the political differences between the Centre and the State would widen further.

On this occasion, not only had they organised a massive procession, but also they delivered provocative speeches. The Jamat-i-Islami seemed to be moving in tandem with the Congress (I) and used this opportunity to the full against Farooq Abdullah's government, thereby adding fuel to the fire already lit by the Congress (I).

As I met Farooq at his home around 6 p.m. on the same day and reported to him the details of my dialogue with Madam Gandhi I had a feeling that he was not paying heed to such a serious matter, or even properly listening to me. Inside me, I felt quite upset about his strange attitude. As he rose to move, I pulled the hemline of his loose kurta showing my annoyance at the same time. "Won't you please sit down and listen to me? It's a serious

matter. Please don't take it lightly."

"Yes, of course. I'll attend to it. Indeed I'm listening", he said while he noticed that his response was annoying me.

"I've promised to her that the 'Opposition Conclave' will not be held in Srinagar next month. We don't loose anything if it isn't held?", I said.

"No! No! now it is impossible to change it. We have done all the preparations for holding the conclave." Saying this he suddenly got up again from his chair.

"Today, there is a dance recital by Yamini Krishnamurthy in the Tagore Hall. We should go there. We shall talk about other matters on our way. Come on with me, please. You must, of course, see this programme."

I had no other option. I went along with him all the time trying to convey to him seriously what all had transpired at New Delhi.

When I mentioned to him about the U.S. journalist (a lady about whom Madam Gandhi had spoken to me) he responded abruptly:

"That lady is so strange! I wonder what all she must have said. She talked to me in such confidence that I thought she was closer to our cause!"

I also conveyed to him how much hurt Indiraji had felt by the naked dance performed by youths in front of her during her speech at Iqbal Park. She believed that there was a hand of the National Conference in those events. As he listened to my words, he didn't make any reply. Instead, he responded with his familiar mischievous smile, as if saying to me: "We've taught her a good lesson."

By this time we had reached the Tagore Hall. As we entered the hall, the programme of dance began. Governor B.K. Nehru and Shobha Nehru were also seated amongst the guests. As they saw me coming in with Farooq, they gave me a welcome look and Mrs. Nehru whispered to me: "Is your task accomplished there?" "Yes, madam, I did my best."

"Meet us around 11 a.m. tomorrow. We shall talk in detail", Shri Nehru directed me.

The local Congress (I) had got the wind of my having met the Prime Minister in Delhi. They could see that Farooq Abdullah was leaving the path of confrontation and settling instead on a reconciliation course, of which my visit to Delhi was only just the beginning. These developments had baffled the Congress (I) leaders, and they wondered how these things came about without their knowledge. They knew Madam Gandhi's mind, and were convinced that it wouldn't be long before she would again adopt a pro-Farooq stance in the State's political affairs.

On account of their apprehensions, they contrived a peculiar trick with the help of the local correspondent of a national news agency. They made up the following news item and got it printed on the front page of the national dailies. The news item appeared somewhat in these words:

"Dr. S.N. Dhar had beaten P.N. Jalali of the P.T.I. and that in the scuffle Jalali had broken his teeth, and got a swollen face. Dr. S.N. Dhar is the brother of Mrs. Khem Lata Wakhlu, MLA."

My brother, Dr. Surender Nath Dhar, is a very well known physician of Srinagar in his own right. And, therefore, whoever read this news item in the national dailies got the impression that he must be some other Doctor by the same name. Everybody understood clearly that it is a politically motivated falsehood perpetrated to malign me.

My brother and his wife Dr. Mrs. Vimla Dhar talked to me on the subject and pressed me to issue some statement about this canard. They wanted me to express my anger against the journalist who had sent this false news despatch. My "Bhabi" was indeed angry with me and she said: "They have the cheek to write such nonsense against us, and we keep quiet about it. This is unfair. This is not done. We have been quite upset. Please you issue some statement against this falsehood."

I appreciated her sentiments. I too had sleepless nights over this matter. But, ultimately when we analysed the event and thought over it carefully, without emotions, we decided that we shall totally ignore the news item. If we hit a cesspool with a stone, we can only get back lot of muck on our own face. And, it doesn't take much time for tales to snowball.

In reality, these dirty tricks had been played to malign me in the eyes of Madam Gandhi and to damage my credibility with her, a cowardly attempt to reduce the importance of what I had conveyed to her on behalf of Dr. Farooq.

Sometime after this incident, my brother had invited Dr. Farooq and some other friends to a private dinner. My brother and Dr. Farooq had studied together in the same school and were friends. As we talked, the story in the newspapers was also discussed. Farooq said: "Surrinder, this story is politically motivated. They have chosen to malign you because of your sister."

"But, as party president, you must contradict this forcefully", said Dr. Dhar.

"Of course, we shall do that, you need not worry. All will be well", replied Dr. Farooq.

The news item was a cooked up one, and deservedly gave the local correspondent of the newspaper a bad feedback in the social circuit. A few days later the newspaper published an innocuous apology at the bottom of the inner page withdrawing the story with regret.

In September, the Vice President of India, Shri Hidayatullah, accompanied by his wife Shrimati Pushpa, was paying a visit to Srinagar. The programme of his engagements in the valley was discussed at the party headquarters and many of our party workers went to the airport to receive the Vice President. Governor B.K. Nehru and Dr. Farooq were there to receive the honourable guests. I saw Madam Pushpa Hidayatullah from a close distance at a reception at Raj Bhavan given in her honour by Mrs. Nehru. Among other things we talked about the secular traditions and exemplary communal harmony of Kashmir. Nobody can make out here who is a Hindu, and who is a Muslim. Mrs. Hidayatullah and Mrs. Nehru were also surprised to learn that even surnames of many people, Hindu as well as Muslim, were the same.

The Vice President of India was to be the Chief Guest at the Annual Convocation of the University of Kashmir. Madam Hidayatullah was also present in the audience. After the usual presentation of candidates for the award of degrees, the medals, prizes, and certificates for excellent performance in various sub-

jects were presented to the candidates. If the candidate happened to be a Muslim by name, the audience would cheer him loudly. If he or she happened to be a non-Muslim, there was no applause at all. Eerie silence would prevail for a few minutes! This became conspicuous.

Everyone in the audience was upset by this exhibition of narrowmindedness by the students and employees. There was apprehension and everyone wondered about the way people's minds were working. Anxiety was evident in the conversation of sensible people. Madam Nehru spoke to me about the incident a few days later.

"I am amazed! Even teachers can behave in a partisan manner. When they have such attitudes, what worth is the education they impart?" she asked anxiously.

"Such a situation would never be dreamt of while Sheikh Sahib was around. Everybody was careful, and no one dared to indulge in such acts," I had replied.

"Who are responsible for these actions?" asked Mrs. Nehru.

"Jammat-i-Islami. They want to establish Nizam-e-Mustafa in the state. The University is filled with the adherents of the creed", I replied.

"Doesn't Farooq do anything about this?", questioned Mrs. Nehru. "Had he acted, things wouldn't have come to such a pass."

This was the bane of the people of the state. There was lots to do, but Farooq had no time for it, nor the necessary zeal. On the other hand he had all the time for joining the National opposition. In spite of the Prime Minister's request, conveyed by me to Dr. Farooq, about not holding the opposition conclave in Srinagar, it began its deliberation in Srinagar as scheduled. Shri Chandrashekhar, Shri N.T. Rama Rao, Shri H.N. Bahuguna, Shri Jyoti Basu, and Mrs. Tarkeshwari Sinha were among some of the leading political persons present in the meeting.

Although many of my colleagues and I in the National Conference were not in favour of holding of this conclave, we participated in the deliberations in the interest of unity within our party.

On the 6th October 1983, a large public rally for the national opposition was held at the Iqbal Park in Srinagar. A galaxy of

opposition leaders of the country were seated on the high dais along with the local leaders of the National Conference. N.T. Rama Rao was the first to address the audience. He was to catch a flight to Delhi soon after and return to Andhra Pradesh. He was dressed in an orange robe; on his forehead he had the three white lines of the holy "Bhasma"; and in his neck he wore a rosary with markedly large beads. Never before had the people of Kashmir seen a politician in that kind of attire. They had only seen "yogis" and "sadhus" (holy men) wearing such apparel.

N.T. Rama Rao's appearance caused a lot of amusement to the crowd which filled the park. With curiosity and understandable interest the people heard his speech which was delivered in Telugu. The strangeness of both his attire and his language seemed to go well together. And the audience burst with loud laughter. Someone from the dais gave them a signal and the laughter subsided. They merely smiled and responded in subdued voices.

The state level leaders of the National Conference watching this scene were feeling irritated. Mohi-ud-din Shah who was sitting by my side on the dais said: "What kind of 'Sadhu' has he brought here?", he was referring to Dr. Farooq's action of holding the conclave.

"Can you make out what he's talking about?" Mr. Habibullah asked me. "When you can't understand how can I? I haven't had a special course in the language", I said laughing. "He's had training in everything", said another person loudly from behind our back. It was Mr. Wani alluding to Farooq.

Thereafter Dr. Farooq spoke and translated the speech of N.T. Rama Rao into Kashmiri. The speech was full of criticism against Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress (I).

Turn by turn the other leaders rose to speak in the same vein, censured Madam Gandhi, and uttered whatever came into their minds against her. The speeches of Chandrasekhar, Bahuguna and Tarkeshwari Sinha were particularly laced with obvious hatred.

An atmosphere of hate and bad behaviour had been already created. Dr. Farooq also was excited by the event and the speeches of the other leaders. Encouraged, he added fuel to the

fire by joining voices with those who spoke before him. He appeared to settle scores with Madam Gandhi and gave vent to his feeling by a speech full of venomous words against her and her party. People responded with loud applause on hearing words against the Congress (I). They shouted out aloud:

"Finish off with these insects of the cesspool!"

Leaving a trail of bitterness behind, the much talked about conclave ended in Srinagar without any solid work to its credit. Within the State, we got back to our routine again. It was autumn now and time to meet the people before the offices would move to the winter capital, Jammu. The meeting of the District Development Board for Srinagar was being held at Prang, a lovely village situated on the banks of river Sendh in the valley. Ministers, MLAs and political leaders of the district were present in the meeting along with the Government officials of various departments. While the meeting was proceeding as scheduled, and the discussion was about education, a member said:

"Sir, there is a school for namesake in our village. It has no teacher and no equipment for teaching either. The teacher perhaps reports at the school only on the day he receives his salary. Who is responsible for such negligence?"

"Where is this school?" asked Dr. Farooq.

"It's hardly a few kilometres from here" replied the member of the Board.

Promptly Dr. Farooq got up from the meeting and said: **"Come on! Come fast. Come with me and we will expose these people. Otherwise these corrupt people will play dirty tricks."**

As he said so, the member concerned and many other officials followed Farooq Abdullah and went along with him. The space under the "shamiana" (awning) where the meeting was held now looked almost deserted. A few of us who were left behind talked about the event:

"Our Chief Minister? He's flamboyant and free. God knows, how many officials will be in soup now?"

Dr. Farooq did not return to the meeting again. The next senior Minister concluded the meeting on his behalf.

A few days later I came to know that the member of the Board had been bribed. He had changed his statement and said that the concerned teacher had been transferred earlier and a new one had replaced him. When Dr. Farooq went to the school he had found a person already present there. He had looked at the people standing around him and with a meaningful smile had told them:

"You have conspired together to hoodwink me. You win, and I lose. But, mind you, never repeat such action again."

Events were happening at this time at a rapid pace.

On 13th October 1983, a one-day cricket match was played in Srinagar between West Indies and India. Special arrangements had been made to accommodate a large number of spectators for this match. A stadium was erected at a cost of seventyfive lakhs of rupees at the Amar Singh Club grounds. A large number of people had come to witness the match. Dr. Farooq had taken keen personal interest in this, being the Chairman of the Cricket Association of the State. Tickets for the match were sold through a large circle of his Association Members, and many had been distributed to people as free passes. Among the spectators there were a good number of students from the University, Regional Engineering College and other educational institutions in the city.

As the match was in progress the players of the Indian team faced a very hostile crowd. These hostile people were mostly young students, belonging to the Jamat-i-Tulba who were determined about creating mischief on the occasion. They disgraced the Indian players by throwing shoes and rubbish on them. These boys waved green crescent moon flags in their hands whenever they wanted to applaud the players of the West Indies team. The players of the home team were deeply irritated and demoralized. They wanted to leave the game.

Dr. Farooq however intervened in the matter personally and persuaded the players to continue the match. He prevented a major fiasco, but a lot of damage had already been done.

Many people had watched the one-day match throughout the country on the national T.V. hook up. What went wrong was also seen by all. Therefore, the matter came up for discussion not only

in Kashmir, but all over the country. The enemies of the National Conference had yet another weapon in their hands. Those very people who had engineered these acts were now in the forefront as vehement critics of the administration.

We met at the Party Headquarters the very next day to discuss the arrangement for the sacred procession of 'Muharram', a religious festival of Shia sect of Muslims. The events at the cricket match were naturally discussed. Members thought that the misbehaviour of the students had given a bad name to the party. Many felt that the Chief Minister, if he had so wished, could have prevented such mischief in the first place. This remark had puzzled me and I had asked: "Why do you think so?"

"If Dr. Farooq had taken us into confidence about the match before, there would have been no such disgraceful fallout", Abdul Samad Teli replied.

"How could we manage to keep out such mischief?", I enquired. I was really curious to know.

"Our workers would have been seated at many places amongst the spectators. Whoever would move to make any mischief would have been curbed instantly", said Mr. Wangnoo.

"That would have been feasible only if someone bothered to ask you" said Mr. Bhat.

"We didn't even get a single 'free pass' for the match. It's the 'bards' who distributed the favours", said another worker. He was referring to those singers and musicians who earlier sung folk songs on the radio and were now in the vanguard of political wheeling-dealing in the party.

Coinciding with the cricket match episode, there were a number of bomb explosions in various parts of Srinagar city. The police announced the arrests of many people in connection with these explosions. However, very soon thereafter those arrested were released on parole. The people were never told who were the elements responsible for these unlawful acts of violence.

I went to the Raj Bhavan and met Governor Nehru. This was sometime after the cricket match. He was quite upset with the attitude and political manouvres of Dr. Farooq.

“How long will Dr. Farooq continue to perform irresponsible acts? he cannot control himself. He speaks without discrimination and restraint. Firstly, it was the opposition conclave; and now it’s this match”. B.K. Nehru said all this in anger before he asked me to sit down.

“Yes! things are in bad shape”, I said.

“You had assured me that you will dissuade him about the conclave? Well he doesn’t really listen to anyone, does he?”

His anger had subsided but his face was still red with rage.

“Soon after my return from Delhi I tried whatever I could”, I said.

“There is a limit to immaturity. How long can I vouch for him? Why doesn’t he understand the situation himself?” Nehru said. It must be recorded that those people in the National Conference who had political experience and discrimination, were against the path of confrontation between the Centre and the State. And a majority of the National Conference workers also were of this view.

In a political affairs meeting of the party held at this time, it was the unanimous opinion of the senior party leaders that the Centre-State confrontation was not only an impediment in our development activity, but also politically counterproductive. And they were convinced that the people will not forgive us if for any reason the train of progress and development is derailed again.

In November 1983, I got quite involved with the elections to the Srinagar Municipal Council. I went into the areas of respective candidates for canvassing votes in favour of the National Conference nominees. Everyday I spoke to many people in the city. In particular, I worked dedicatedly in the constituency of Dharamvir Singh Oberoi. When the election results were declared, I was happy to see that the National Conference had won a majority. Shri Dharamvir Singh Oberoi was also elected as the President of the Srinagar Municipal Council.

Towards the end of November, all the Members of the J & K Assembly were to move to Jammu for official business. At the

airport I met Shri A.R. Shaheen and Shri Habibullah Munshi, of the National Conference who had earlier been Ministers in the Sheikh's cabinet. Muzaffar Ahmad, son of G.M. Shah, also accompanied them. Both Shaheen and Habibullah belonged to G.M. Shah's group in the party, and were known to be publicly critical of Farooq Abdullah's policies.

At this time the Jamat-i-Islami and its related organisations had begun a campaign against Farooq Abdullah through printed posters. He was severely criticized for having visited the shrine of Vaishnov Devi. He was also blamed for misleading the Muslim population. Even before such propaganda had become manifest, it was evident that, within the administration itself, the sympathizers and fellow travellers of the Jamat were creating mischief and influencing policy. There was a growing feeling of alienation among the non-Muslim employees in the government. Also, a growing circle of educated Muslims were being subtly influenced. They were exhibiting strange prejudices and obscurantism. The growing influence of the Jamat-i-Islami ideology was creating dissensions within the National Conference rapidly. The once solid political party was now fissured.

After the meeting at Jammu was over, Dr. Farooq invited all the members of the State legislature and the members of Cabinet to dinner at his official residence. On this occasion many people expressed their views on the current political situation. Members were quite frank and criticized the policy of growing confrontation between the Central and State government. Prominent among the critics were Munshi Habibullah, Sona-ullah Dar and Talib Hussain. They also emphasized the need for strengthening the organisational base of the party. Mr. Neelora, Buland Khan and others spoke. Thereafter when Salam Deva stood up to speak, he was interrupted by Dr. Farooq who stood up suddenly and began to address the gathering. He said: "Please, have dinner. Begum Sahiba would be waiting for me."

"We haven't finished, speaking yet?" Salam Deva said with obvious resentment.

"You can also continue the conversation", replied Farooq, and

left.

As Farooq left Salam Deva raised his hand to the skies and sadly remarked: "Oh, God! now you alone save us!" Seeing Dr. Farooq off, the Ministers who were present also offered excuses and left.

The Members left behind were much annoyed and they spoke a lot against the prevailing situation.

After my return to Srinagar, when I met Sheikh Nazir, I raised this matter with him in the context of the Jammu meeting.

He said: "All these members who are now critical actually want to be Ministers in the Government. That explains their hostility." He did not appear to understand the seriousness of the issues. "But if Farooq Sahib had stayed on and listened to them, it would have been good. They would have felt relieved and their complaints would have become irrelevant", I said.

"He is never in one place for long. I have to get his signatures on many files and I am trying to locate him", Nazir Sahib said.

"Salam Deva was quite angry and upset", I said.

"He thinks he's a veteran of his area. And, there is some weight in that. He has made many sacrifices, which entitles him to become a Minister" said Sheikh Nazir smilingly.

Although Sheikh Nazir was late Sheikh Abdullah's nephew, he lived in Sheikh Abdullah's residence. He also treated Sheikh Sahib and Begum Abdullah like his own parents showing them deep respect. It was also generally believed that he was indeed the person who cared for their homely comforts.

Tensions within the National Conference, the State-Centre rift, and the increasing extremism amongst the youth were causing a dangerous slide in the administration. Rumours about the fall of the Farooq government were rampant. The print media at the national level began a chorus about imposing President's rule in the state. Not only that, even the ruling Congress (I) at the Centre made a scathing attack on the government of Farooq Abdullah during its annual session held at Calcutta. They also expressed anxiety over the deteriorating law and order situation in the State. The resolutions of the Calcutta session of the Congress (I) pro-

vided a green signal to the State Congress (I) and they began to sharpen their weapons and keep ready their political armoury for combat.

At this juncture I wrote a letter to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wherein I pleaded once again for harmony and compromise and for overlooking differences of the past. I believed, Farooq Abdullah also desired this.

In January 1984 Governor B.K. Nehru was suddenly called to New Delhi. The newspapers gave prominence to the news, and as soon as Shri Nehru was on his way to Delhi, rumours made the rounds in Srinagar. Everywhere people surmised that the Farooq Government will be dismissed and President's rule established in the state. Work in the Secretariat came to a halt and employees were seen discussing the implications of Governor's visit to Delhi. However, when the Governor soon returned in the normal course, the rumours were smothered completely.

The Legislative Assembly of the State met in February 1984. I came to know that many Members of the Legislative Assembly were engaged in hatching a plot against Farooq Abdullah. These people owed their allegiance to G.M. Shah and they made their loyalties known publicly. They were also against the political stance taken by Farooq.

On one of those days, I called on the Governor and Madam Nehru. Nehru Sahib was quite upset with Dr. Farooq. He said: "When will he mature? Is it proper to take cudgels with the Central Government?", there was much sadness in his voice.

"If you agree, I might go and meet Madam Gandhi?" I didn't want this government to fall, and perceiving my anxiety, Governor Nehru said:

"Your going alone won't do. Let you head a delegation. Take along Shri S.K.Kaul too."

"I'll talk to Kaul Sahib today; also I need to talk to some other people" I replied.

"Farooq doesn't listen to anybody. He makes contradictory statements", Nehru said.

Thereafter I met S.K. Kaul. He was not only prepared, but

rather pleased to undertake this task. S.K. Kaul, a former MLA, is well known in political circles. He was also associated with numerous social welfare organisations in the state.

Next day when I met Dr. Farooq in the Assembly Hall, and related to him the conversation I had had with Governor Nehrū, he was not pleased about the idea of my meeting Madam Gandhi. I could perceive that he didn't even want to hear the name of Indira Gandhi, not to speak of our meeting her in person.

A lot had been talked about the personal traits of Farooq Abdullah ever since he came into limelight. This time around, I began to see some truth in what was being said. Many had complained that he did not keep his promises. Others said that he spoke against people behind their back. Some even blamed him for holding out false promises. I used to dismiss all these accusations as coming from the Opposition and out of malice.

In this context, I remembered a personal anecdote. My brother, Dr. S.N. Dhar had invited Dr. Farooq to a private dinner.

The very next day Dr. Farooq, as Minister of Health, issued orders of transfer of Dr. Dhar from Srinagar to Jammu. They had been friends at school and college and often played cricket together. Thereafter, when I asked Farooq about this sudden order of transfer, he had unhesitatingly said: "Surinder has to go to Jammu only for a week!"

Not to speak of one week, a whole year passed by without any change in the order. Whenever I raised the matter with him, he brushed the topic aside. I was not alone in being so treated, many others had experienced similar treatment.

In February batches of members of the Assembly were sent out on a tour of different states of the country. I was included in one group which went to Karnataka and Kerala in the South. We toured in Mysore, Bangalore and Trivandrum. R.K. Hegde was the Chief Minister of Karnataka when we met during our visit. Elsewhere also we met some of the senior political leaders. Dr. Farooq also paid a visit to Bangalore during these days to attend the marriage of his friend's son there. Our members called on him at the palatial Windson Manor Hotel where he was staying. He made enquiries from us about our tour. Then we discussed the

political situation in the country and the Punjab problem. In the course of the conversation, Farooq blurted out: "The country will be torn to pieces. You'll see." Suddenly his eyes met mine. He stared blankly at me for a while and then regaining his composure said: "There is turbulence all over the country. What will happen where, one cannot say."

What he said, and the way he said it, struck like arrows in my chest. I don't know why.

The people in my group were, among others, Talib Hussain, Hakim Mohd. Yasin, Ghulam Hassan Mir, and Malik Ghulam-ud-din who later parted company with Farooq and accepted G.M. Shah as their leader. They were all disenchanted with Dr. Farooq.

After we met Chief Minister R.K. Hegde, many members of the Janata Party invited us to dinner. Most of them were Muslim leaders and they wanted to impress us, a Kashmiri delegation, with their culture and culinary delicacies. After dinner one day, a Janata Party stalwart took us to the main market where he had a cosmetics shop. On one side of the shop, a narrow staircase led to the basement. As we went there, I wondered where we were being led? As we entered the large basement, we found it filled with books, pamphlets and literature. There were large maps, showing the Islamic world, hanging on the walls. Located on the maps and prominently displayed were the places where weapons like the Islamic bomb were in process. Most literature was in the Persian script and I couldn't make out the titles. Our guide was enthusiastically explaining the displays to us. When we left the precincts, we were given large bundles of literature from the cell which we carried home to Srinagar.

On 26th March 1984, during the course of the Assembly session, Dr. Farooq made a momentous statement on the floor of the House revealing that B.K. Nehru had been replaced as Governor of J & K. He would soon be relieved by Shri Jagmohan who had been appointed in place of Shri Nehru. There was an eerie silence in the Assembly. I felt the ground under my feet sinking. Abdul Ghani Lone and Bhim Singh, two members of the house, asked the Chief Minister for an explanation. They wanted to know, if he was aware of the impending change? "I was neither

consulted, nor was I aware of any such moves. The Home Minister just called me about this." Farooq left immediately.

With the transfer of the Governor, the rumour mills got moving fast again, and the media played up the events fully. At this time, Maulana Mohd. Farooq also began to make wild political statements beginning with a tirade against the Central Government. The state government was not paying any attention to the virulent statements of the Maulana. On the other hand, processions organized by the Congress (I) highlighting people's resentment against growing lawlessness and mounting corruption were suppressed by the police, even by firing on the mobs. Some were also killed in police firing. The Central Govt. appeared to be convinced that democracy in the State was getting a raw deal while forces of communalism were given a free hand.

Soon after when the winter session of the Assembly concluded in Jammu we went to attend a reception at the Raj Bhavan. We were all very distressed. I couldn't talk to B.K. Nehru.

As if to make matters worse, I had a fall in the Tourist Hotel where I was staying. I fractured my leg which was subsequently plastered.

As I was waiting at the Jammu airport for my departure to Srinagar, I met Madam Nehru. She was returning from Srinagar.

Seeing me in plaster she asked: "What happened? Why are you moving in that condition?" I was walking along with support given by my sister.

"No, No, you shouldn't move about like that. Isn't there a wheel chair available here?" The security personnel heard her and started making a fuss about me. I was quite embarrassed. Madam Nehru had the habit of going into minute details, whatever the task. Her empathy and concern for others were part of her humanness. For me personally, she had come very close. I still cherish those memories and the closeness. I was grounded because of my broken leg. However, as soon as my plaster was removed, I had to rush to New Delhi where I was called on short notice. I arrived in Delhi during the day and the same evening I met Madam Gandhi. She asked me to sit. I noticed her eyes were sparkling with anger while I tried to anticipate the purpose of the meeting and her

mood. Even before I could ask or say anything, she spoke in an angry voice:

"Did Mr. Farooq listen to you? That is how he deals with everyone. He has held Kashmir to ransom. He is hobnobbing with Pakistan. The number of extremists is increasing in the state day by day. They are hell bent on destroying the country. He is even thick with the Sikh extremists and has allowed Gurnut camps to be opened in the state. Sikh extremists are being trained in those camps."

"Gurnut camps?" I said, rather stunned, having been taken unawares.

"He meets some Sikh extremist leaders routinely. Even he has met Bhindranwale."

I had a blank expression on my face, because deep down I wasn't prepared to believe all she said. "How can he run the Government when he doesn't know what he is doing and where? His irresponsibility is proving to be quite troublesome to us. The Jamat-i-Islami and the Maulana's party (Awami Action Committee) are working zealously without restraint and sowing the seeds of discord in the valley."

By now she had calmed down somewhat, but I realized and felt that deep down in her heart she was hurt and wounded by someone, and every word she said reflected that mood of personal animus.

When I asked her a question in the context of these accusations she said:

"Where nation's interests are concerned, individuals and their concerns are not important. To save the country, at certain times, it may even be necessary to make sacrifices."

While saying so she became quite emotional and her words expressed deep patriotic sentiments and love of country.

As I came out of her residence my heart was heavy. I wondered why events were taking such a turn.

Tension and group dissensions within the National Conference now came into the open. Those who had faith in the leadership of G.M. Shah broke from the party and formed a new political party

of their own. They claimed that the group led by G.M. Shah was the real inheritor of the tradition and values of the National Conference. The new party was named as National Conference (Khalida), N.C.(K) for short. Khalida is the elder daughter of Sheikh Abdullah, Dr. Farooq's sister, and wife of G.M. Shah. In order to express their political clout in public the new party held a convention in the Iqbal Park at Srinagar. Many prominent members of the State Legislative Assembly, Legislative Council, and veterans of the party attended this convention. Thus the party was divided into two distinct groups one headed by Dr. Farooq (son of Sheikh Abdullah) and the other by Khalida Shah and G.M. Shah (Sheikh's daughter and son-in-law).

The division of the party was a non-event so far as the people were concerned. Mostly they perceived the issues as a domestic war of succession between the son and the son-in-law. The people also recalled to mind an earlier situation when the National Conference was split over the leadership issue. In 1957, G.M. Sadiq and his loyal group of supporters had parted company with Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed and formed the Democratic National Conference (D.N.C.). Bakshi was Prime Minister of Jammu & Kashmir in 1953-64. G.M. Sadiq later patched up with Bakshi Ghulam Mohd. and the D.N.C. was dissolved. G.M. Sadiq became Chief Minister in 1964 and in 1965 he converted the National Conference, lock stock and barrel, into the state unit of the Indian National Congress. Ten years later, it was Sheikh Abdullah who revived the National Conference again in 1975.

Soon after the convention, when I attended the N.C. meeting at Mujahid Manzil, many workers referred to the developments in the party. They also mentioned the names of persons who had attended the meeting of the N.C.(K), and even named the children of some MLA who had worked hard to make a success of the convention. The names of businessmen who had donated money for the meeting were also well known to the workers. During these conversations I noticed workers were angry with Mohan Kishen Tikku, earlier a Minister in Sheikh Abdullah's cabinet, who had also participated in the deliberations of N.C.(K). I myself heard abuses being hurled on Tikku Sahib by name even

though he was only one among the many senior leaders of the party who had joined the N.C.(K). What rudely shocked me was this strange behaviour of singling out Mohan Kishen Tikku for such shabby treatment.

Here I am reminded of another incident which took place in the Govt. secretariat at Jammu. P.L. Handoo, Revenue Minister in Farooq's Govt., was wounded by someone in his office with a sharp weapon. He had to be removed to hospital in that condition. The newspapers published the incident on the front pages. A few days later, the matter was brought up for discussion in the Provincial Committee meeting of the N.C. which I also attended. I proposed that a resolution, condemning the murderous attack on Handoo Sahib, be passed at the meeting. The members did not heed my request. I was surprised. They did not even show any response to my suggestion. In fact, I had the feeling that they deliberately avoided the subject; the reason could be personal rivalry and envy against Handoo.

The National Conference (Farooq), N.C.(F), also held its convention sometime later in the Iqbal Park. A large number of people had come to attend this meeting. Farooq along with his colleagues in the cabinet, Begum Sheikh Abdullah, members of the Assembly and office bearers of the party from the districts participated in the Conference. Amidst lot of noise, many resolutions were passed at the convention. There were speeches by many leaders. However, those who had been reported to have attended the earlier convention of N.C.(K) were conspicuous by their absence in this gathering.

The programme of this convention included a public procession through the streets of Srinagar after the business session was over. This procession was flagged off from within the interior of the old city at the Bohri Kadal chowk. (This is near the same place where Mohd. Youssuf Halwai, a staunch worker of the N.C., was later mercilessly shot dead by miscreants in broad daylight in August 1989.)

The vanguard of the procession comprised three trucks. The first one carried a large number of young men dressed like women. Equipped with musical instruments like "sarangi"

“rabab” and “Tumbaknar” (the Kashmiri percussion instrument for rhythm), the group looked like a “Baccha Nagma” troupe. (A folk music ensemble of not so memorable Pathan rule in Kashmir.) The youth were dancing to the rhythm of the “Tumbaknar”. Red flag of the N.C. and the green flag of the Awami Action Committee were fluttering together in the show. Alongside the truck moved the workers of the N.C. with those of Awami Action Committee (A.A.C.), loudly clapping their hands and attracting the attention of the people.

The second truck carried Dr. Farooq Abdullah along with some of his colleagues. I was seated in a jeep which followed this truck. As the procession moved on through the main street the groups of singing youth lashed out abuses against G.M. Shah. “Gul Shah. . . . He is a . . .” (These are unprintable abuses shouted in Kashmiri.) Their shouts rent the skies. The procession went along with people shouting abuses against Gul Shah, his wife Khalida, and their daughter in rhymed Kashmiri couplets. These rowdy demonstrations of abuse by the participants continued from the beginning to the end of the procession. I was deeply grieved to see this exhibition of obscene and uncivilized behaviour of the young. I was feeling embarrassed to actually see all this in public. The behaviour of the youth did not behove a cultured society. I felt helpless in the circumstances. What grieved me even more was that Dr. Farooq was putting up non-chalantly with such abuse against his own sister and brother-in-law. When I caught a glimpse of him, standing on the truck, he was cheering and laughing with the crowds, the youths watching him gleefully!

As the procession of people appeared around a turn on the Hari Singh High Street, there was Begum Abdullah watching the scene from a balcony above the shops. She was showering flowers over her son and other leaders. As the youths noticed her, they were suddenly enthused and began shouting slogans of abuse in defamatory language against Khalida Shah and G.M. Shah. Begum Sahiba’s younger daughter was also watching the scene standing alongside her. I wondered what the Begum was thinking of all that was happening.

This matter came in for comment by workers at a meeting held sometime after these events. Many knowledgeable amongst them said about the rowdy behaviour: "These are the misdeeds of the Awami Action Committee. Maulvi Farooq has wreaked vengeance of generations against the National Conference." "Khalidaji is our sister. I couldn't bear such abuse hurled against her."

"When her own brother put up with it, what could we do?"

"Maulvi Farooq wanted precisely this—to get into our fold and suppress us completely, and settle scores with us."

On June 7, 1984 I was alone at my home when the telephone rang. Someone said, "Please call the police. There is a huge procession of Sikhs here, and people are indulging in arson of shops and houses. They are advancing fast. We are also trying to phone the police." The person was calling from Wazir Bagh area of Srinagar. His voice quivered with panic.

As soon as I hung up, the phone rang again.

This time it was my aunt on the phone. She lives in the same area, and was frightened by the events. She too sought police help. Very near her house, a couple of shops and a house had been set on fire. The news was frightening and I was nervous. I contacted the Governor, the Chief Secretary and the Divisional Commissioner on the phone, seeking their help to save the situation from worsening. In the meanwhile, the news of arson and loot of many homes trickled in continuously. Many houses were stoned and their household effects scattered on the streets.

This day was also the festival of "Jyaisht Ashtmi", when the Kashmiri Hindus celebrate the annual day of prayers at the temple of goddess Khirbhawani, 20 km from Srinagar. Many people go to the temple. On this day therefore, a sizable crowd had gone to pray at this temple. Dr. Farooq had also paid an impromptu visit to the temple to oversee official arrangements for law and order and transport of pilgrims. As the news about the arson and turmoil in the city reached the people there, chaos and confusion gripped their minds. It was reported later by these very people that their confusion was compounded by the words Dr. Farooq spoke to the

people thus:

"Your houses are being burnt in the town and you are not even bothered? Get back home quickly."

This created a turmoil and everyone ran for the available transport and tried to get home.

Next day Dr. Farooq paid a visit to a few houses in Wazir Bagh to see the damage caused by arson. There in presence of people of the locality he observed:

"I had thought the whole Mohalla had been set ablaze and burnt to ashes. Actually, I see only a few houses burnt! Such loud noises had been made that I had expected the worst calamity." People were furious at this statement from the Head of the Government.

Many responsible Kashmiri Sikhs who we met later on were of the firm opinion that most of the participants in the Sikh procession were not people belonging to the state. They were outsiders from Punjab and belonged to the extremists groups who had specifically joined together to extend Punjab-like turmoil in the valley. It was also noticed that many local miscreants had also joined the procession and indulged in creating the ensuing havoc.

On June 19, 1984, I went to meet Dr. Farooq at his residence. I was earnest to discuss important issues with him but he did not seem to have time. He was in a hurry.

"I am in a hurry. Please tell me in a few minutes whatever you want to say", he said to me.

"You shall have to find some time to listen to me on some important issues I want to talk to you about", I replied.

I was quite upset and rather perturbed that Dr. Farooq did not appear to be interested. He was still governed by his own whims and despotic actions. He said: **"You get an appointment fixed by Rather (Rather was his Private Secretary)"**. And he left.

There were many other Members of the Assembly and political workers whom he brushed aside in the same manner. I had the feeling that for sometime now he had been thus avoiding contact with Members of the Assembly on one pretext or the other.

Around this time an official function of the Department of

Industries of the Government was held at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Complex (SKICC) on the banks of the Dal Lake. This prestigious and beautifully located Conference Centre was among the several monumental buildings which late Sheikh Abdullah got constructed in Srinagar at the cost of several hundred crores of rupees in order to make the city of Srinagar a modern day heaven for international tourism.

The invitees to the Conference included amongst others, Begum Abdullah and Molly Abdullah, wife of Dr. Farooq. Rafiq Hussain Khan was the Minister of Industries, J & K Govt. As Begum Sahiba rose to address the gathering she showered lots of praise on the young Industries Minister. The occasion did not require this kind of speech, but it was obvious that there was an attempt by her to instil the spirit of team work and unity amongst the colleagues in Farooq's cabinet. Perhaps she was quite aware of the rapidly growing dissensions in the party with many of his colleagues disenchanted with his ways and seeking earnestly to part company with him. I talked to Molly Abdullah personally on this day and sought her help to let me share my misgivings with her husband, and talk to him on important issues. She heard me quietly, but I got the impression that she was not quite interested in his political affairs.

I sought an appointment to meet Dr. Farooq on several days thereafter, by talking personally on phone to Mr. Rather. But it was evident to me from his tone, as well as from his inability to fix my appointment, that even he was working under a severe strain. He did not seem to be quite certain about the whereabouts of the Chief Minister; he did not know where Dr. Farooq could be found, or with whom he would be at what place and what time.

Dilawar Mir, Deputy Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly, saw me in the Assembly Secretariat one day. He wished me and exchanged a few pleasantries. Then he spoke in a serious tone:

"I have to discuss an important matter with you." Together we proceeded to his room and he called for tea. As we talked he brought up the question of the deteriorating political situation in

the state. He said:

“Dr. Farooq has ruined this state. By hobnobbing with the opposition groups, he has damaged our credibility. The torch of secularism which was held high by Baba-i-Quam (late Sheikh Abdullah) all these years has been extinguished by Farooq. Why has he taken cudgels with the Central Government? We are not able to fathom his objectives or vision. Now he won't stay in office for long?” I could sense from his utterances that he was loyal to the group led by G.M. Shah. Although he held the post of Deputy Speaker, he was quite disillusioned with Farooq Abdullah.

“He is quitting?” I asked Dilawar Mir with anxious surprise. At the same time the conversation with Madam Gandhi began to ring in my mind.

“I shall speak to you about these matters at your home”, Dilawar assured me.

On the same day, at about 11 o'clock in the night I received a telephone call from Delhi. I was directed to see Shri Mangat Ram Sharma MLA who belonged to the Congress (I) in the Jammu and Kashmir State.

The next day Dilawar Mir called on me at my home. He divulged to me how they were trying to save the boat of the state from drowning by Farooq's actions. He explained that the withdrawal of support from Farooq was a step necessary to save the state from ruination and further damage. “It was a step at the right time and in the best interests of the state”, he said.

I couldn't sleep that night. Whatever had happened earlier was not right, what was going on now was not correct, and what would befall us in future would be even worse. I was sad, and wondering why I was being dragged into this whirlpool. I was angry with Dr. Farooq. Had he not acted the way he had all these previous months, the situation would not have precipitated in this manner. Also, it was not uncommon for people to express their resentment over the poor law and order situation in the state. The administration had been paralyzed. I had at this time written to the Editor of the *Times of India* defending the Farooq Government

against the growing accusations made about poor law and order in the state. Although in the political, administrative sense the law and order was poor, yet it is a fact that even in those situations Srinagar was still the only city in the country where a woman wearing gold ornaments could walk around in the town alone even late at night! I had highlighted these facts in order to defend Farooq's government against the growing criticism made in the media.

Mangat Ram Sharma of the Congress (I) and Janak Raj Gupta, another senior leader of the same party in the state, called on me at my house soon after Dilawar Mir had met me. They had also been directed from Delhi to make contact with me. During the course of a prolonged conversation they argued their case against the Farooq Government and came out with a long list of wrongs done by him and highlighted numerous events that had been a cause for concern to all well-wishers of the people. At the same time they entreated me to give up support to Farooq Government and instead join the Shah group of the National Conference, thereby enabling Shah Sahib to form the government of the state. When I asked them a question in this regard, they replied: "Why, don't you remember how in that procession he ignored insults spoken against his own sister? A person who cannot show a modicum of faithfulness to his own sister, how can he be loyal to anyone else? It would be futile to trust such a person."

"Madam Gandhi helped to put him in the saddle and enabled him to acquire stature. Now he has turned the tables against her. Isn't he guilty of breach of trust? Isn't that a betrayal?", asked Mangat Ram Sharma in an angry tone.

I was, in my heart of hearts, devoted to Madam Gandhi. Deep down in my psyche she was the epitome of an exalted leader and a fine person, whose personal qualities I eulogized. I had felt a strange closeness and affinity with her, and it was painful for me to hear words spoken against her. Besides that, her own words were ringing in my ears and wrenching my heart. She had even clearly mentioned that in the larger interests of the nation and its integrity, the consideration of personal interests or even the role

of individuals are insignificant.

There was some truth in what they were saying but I was quite sad and upset.

“Madam Gandhi wants that the secular forces in the state join hands so that the boat is retrieved from the quagmire. And besides, Shah Sahib is not an outsider. He is a senior leader of the National Conference, and his wife Khalidaji is, after all, also Sheikh Sahib's daughter” Sharma Sahib said.

It was well past midnight when these two gentlemen left. Even after all that they had told me, I was not inclined to believe nor did I wish, that the Farooq Government should fall. In my desperation I made yet another attempt to see Dr. Farooq in this connection in order to forestall this move by his opponents and prevent the fall of his government. I went to his home. He was not there. His Private Secretary was engrossed in his work. It seemed as though he was the Chief Minister. When I enquired from him about Farooq Abdullah, he said: “Whoever drops in here, and says he wants to discuss important matters with the Chief Minister, I have to give him an appointment? If the matter is that urgent, why don't you dash to the Secretariat and see him there?”

Rather's impolite reply annoyed me. Without responding to him, I telephoned Dr. Farooq immediately. He was not in the Secretariat. I was told that he was out on a tour.

In the days ahead, many people called on me, and some spoke to me on the phone. They had only one objective: to pressurize and persuade me to join hands with them actively in order to topple the Farooq government.

While I was battling with this predicament, I had a very strange experience. It was not even remotely political, but a spiritual encounter with my own real self. This experience changed my perception totally and the clouds of doubt were cleared. I felt relieved and light in my heart. After this incident, whatever came my way, I accepted without any questioning.

On 23rd June, a function was organized at the Islamia School, in downtown Srinagar, under the aegis of Nusrat-ul-Islam. The Chairman of the Managing Committee of the school was Maulana

Farooq. He had invited Sayyed Mir Qasim, former Chief Minister of J & K, Dr. Farooq, and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kashmir to this meeting. I was also present on the occasion as an invitee. While others spoke on the teachings of Islam for humankind, Dr. Farooq chose to speak differently and addressed the audience:

“The people of our state are sychophants and they follow no creed. They are only worshipers of mammon, and are prepared to do any deed for meeting their selfish goals. Tomorrow, G.M. Shah will be Chief Minister and the people will rush to garland him and hover around him. They will carry trays loaded with sweets to his home. People will shower him with ‘Shireen’ (white sweet candy drops used by Kashmiris on festive occasions) and ladies will welcome him with ‘wanwun’ (lyrical folk song accompanied by rhythmical movement, sung in a chorus by women together).”

What made Dr. Farooq say all this it is difficult to understand. He might have had a premonition about the take over of his government by G.M. Shah. It is even more difficult to say whether, if he suspected anything on this score, he had taken any steps to remedy the situation.

The festival of Id was fast approaching. A few days before the festival, Sheikh Nazir called on me. I talked to him at length about the political situation, and mentioned categorically that Dr. Farooq had done great harm to the party. Sheikh Nazir did not say much, but it was quite evident that he, too, was aware about the gloomy situation and was unhappy with Farooq’s political style and his actions. He also thought that Farooq did not listen to anyone and mostly acted on his own volition. He considered even his well-wishers as his enemies.

As Sheikh Nazir took leave to go I told him: “Dr. Farooq is fully responsible for whatever has happened.”

And in reply he said:

“There is no doubt about that.” He also added: “Insha-Allah! we shall see things improve when we discuss these issues after Id.”

On Id I paid the customary "Id Mubarak" to Dr. Farooq at his home where I had gone with my husband. Dr. Farooq met many people and reciprocated their Id greetings. He offered me and my husband Kashmiri "Kahwa" tea and almonds as is customary on such festive occasion. We did not talk about any political or official subjects, nor was there any strain in our conversation. Even amongst the people there was no apprehension of any imminent change. We also paid our respects to Begum Abdullah at her residence and exchanged greetings.

Chapter 20

G.M. Shah as Chief Minister

ACCOMPANIED by Janak Raj Gupta, I went to meet Mehboob Beg at his residence at Barzulla, Srinagar. He is the son of late Mirza Mohammed Afzal Beg who had served the people of Kashmir for fortyfive years alongside Sheikh Abdullah and Begum Abdullah. He was given the title of "Faqr-i-Kashmir" (the pride of Kashmir) by the people. Unfortunately, towards the end of their lives this long friendship had become severely strained, and the inevitable parting of ways had taken place.

Within fifteen minutes of my arrival at Beg's house G.M. Shah arrived. I was most surprised to see him in Beg's house. Shah Sahib was happy to see me there. He said: "I got the information that you will support us."

This was the first time after Sheikh Sahib's demise that I was meeting G.M. Shah. I did not respond to what he said. Instead, he continued:

"I wonder who are responsible for spreading accusations against us? They have even accused me for the removal of Beg Sahib from the party! I respected him immensely. He was not an ordinary leader."

I felt Shah Sahib had no need to justify himself before me. Or maybe, he said all these things only to remove any misgivings in the mind of Dr. Beg. We were listening to him quietly. He continued:

"People have been misinformed about me. They have painted me in the blackest of colour, even alleged that I had hastened Sheikh Sahib's death. I have spent a life time working by his side and the best part. I have been imprisoned while serving the people's cause, and I kept their struggle alive." G.M. Shah became quite emotional.

"You were definitely accused of having a hand in my father's removal", Dr. Mehboob Beg said to evoke a further response from G.M. Shah.

"It doesn't cost people to cook up stories. They are prepared to do anything in order to acquire power."

I heard them and I was quiet. I felt that I had no particular role to play in this drama. Yet, I was constrained to be present willy-nilly on this stage.

"Did you not see how people were hurling abuses on Khalida and her mother and brothers were silently watching?", Shah Sahib said, his face turning red with anger and hatred.

He did not ask me any questions; perhaps he knew, more than anybody else the person at whose behest I had agreed to lend him support. Even my colleagues were aware of this development. Shah Sahib showed me a list of names of the Members of the Assembly who had agreed to offer their support in the event of his claiming the leadership of the National Conference Legislature Party.

On July 1, 1984, exactly at 9 o'clock in the evening, a car was sent to my residence to take me to Srinagar. Janak Raj Gupta had personally come with the vehicle. I went in the car with him to the home of Mr. Iqbal Ahmed (nicknamed Iqbal Diathene because of his dealing in business of pesticides of that name). His house was located in Sheikh Bagh, Srinagar.

For me, this house brought back cherished memories of earlier years. Earlier this house belonged to the famous physician of Srinagar, Dr. Gwash Lal Kaul. Dr. Kaul was a close friend of my parents family. The house was therefore quite familiar to me. I had spent some memorable days of my childhood there. I had played with Dr. Kaul's daughter, Nancy, in the same house and together we had seen every nook and corner of the mansion.

As I went up the staircase of the ground floor it did not seem a stranger's house but my own. I did not know Iqbal Ahmad before. There was one difference, however between then and now. The house had been lavishly painted and looked more dazzling.

In a large room on the first floor there were a few people present, namely Shri Sona-ullah Dar (MLA); Shri Hakim Yasin,

MLA and Shri Ghulam Hassan Mir, MLA. They were quite happy to see me. Other members were meeting somewhere else. Mr. Iqbal's son and another relation looked after us very well. Later we had dinner at the same place.

After dinner we went to the home of Shri Tirath Ram Amla, M.P. Shri Amla was a highly respected citizen of Jammu and Kashmir and was a leading businessman of the state. He was also a Member of the Rajya Sabha from the state for many years. He had lent his support to the freedom struggle of the people of Kashmir over the last four decades in numerous ways. The other members of the Assembly were already present there with Shri D.D. Thakur and G.M. Shah. We spent the night at this house. Ms. Gurbachan Kumari Rana and I were lodged in one room while the others sat through the night or rested in phases, or spent the night in loud conversation. We could not get much sleep.

Early next day we went in a convoy of vehicles to the Raj Bhavan. All day we were with Governor Jagmohan who maintained a constant telephone-link with the Central Government. Later we learnt that Jagmohan was persuading the Centre desperately for the promulgation of Governor's rule in the State.

On the other hand, G.M. Shah was trying his best to include his trusted friend and lieutenant, G.N. Kochak, into the proposed new cabinet to be sworn in soon. There was considerable discussion over this issue. Dr. Mehboob Beg and Dilawar Mir were not in agreement over inclusion of Kochak. They thought that G.N. Kochak and Ghulam Din Shah could be included in the cabinet sometime later. Although, I had agreed to support G.M. Shah, I was not keen to join his Ministry. It was on the insistence of Janak Raj Gupta and Mangat Ram Sharma that I agreed eventually to join the Ministry.

There was another problem which faced G.M. Shah. He and D.D. Thakur wanted to have a two-tier Ministry of Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of State. This matter also gave rise to contentious discussion amongst the members, making it difficult to decide who will be included in which tier of the cabinet. When the members were silent for a moment, I took the lead and said: "I will take a place in the second-tier". No sooner had I said this,

Ghulam Hassan Mir and Hakim Yaseen also volunteered to accept to be in the second tier. Both Shah Sahib and Thakur Sahib were pleased with our response, which, however, was not to be of much use. Another complication arose with the obstinate attitude of Ms. Rana who insisted on two conditions: that she shall have Cabinet rank and have no other portfolio except that of Excise and Taxation. Janak Raj Gupta took her aside into the lawns of Raj Bhavan and tried to persuade her for a while. I felt extremely sad and disgusted at the proceedings. Was this supposed to be the sacrifice for the nation? Even at this critical juncture actions were being dictated by personal interests and greed.

Ultimately it was settled that Kochak and Ghulam Din would not be inducted into the Cabinet at present and there shall be one tier Ministry only.

G.M. Shah presented his request to the Governor, who called Dr. Farooq to the Raj Bhavan to inform him that thirteen Members of the Legislative Assembly had withdrawn support from his Ministry, and given it instead to G.M. Shah. Farooq rushed back to discuss the grave political situation with his colleagues. In the meanwhile the Chief Secretary, Mir Nasarullah and the Director General of Police, Peer Ghulam Hassan Shah were summoned to meet the Governor.

When Governor Jagmohan was convinced that Dr. Farooq has lost the support of the thirteen members of the National Conference, as well as the support of the twenty six members of the Congress(I) in the Assembly of seventyfive members, he called upon G.M. Shah to assume the charge of Chief Minister and form the Cabinet. The Congress (I) declared its support to the Shah Ministry without any preconditions.

The oath of office was administered to the cabinet colleagues of Shah Sahib at the Raj Bhavan. Among those present were Khalida Shah, wife of G.M. Shah, Tariq Abdullah, workers and leaders of the National Conference (Khalida group), N.C.(K) in short, leaders of the Congress (I) and government officials.

After G.M. Shah, it was D.D. Thakur who took the oath of office. The following people then took the oath of office as Cabinet Ministers: Hissam-ud-din Bandey; Talib Hussain; Mun-

shi Habibullah; Ali Mohd. Naik; Ghulam Hassan Mir; Sona-ullah Dar; Dr. Mehboob Beg; Sheikh Abdul Jabbar; Mrs Khem Lata Wakhlu; Hakim Mohd Yasin; Mohd Khalil Jowher; Dilawar Mir; and Ms. Gurbachan Kumari Rana.

As the brief function concluded, workers from the audience raised the slogans: "Gul Shah - Padshah"; "National Conference Zindabad", "Khalidaji Zindabad". The slogans created quite a noise in the otherwise quiet atmosphere of Raj Bhavan. The Governor congratulated G.M. Shah. Already Shah Sahib and his colleagues were surrounded by senior government officers who were congratulating them. They seemed to be keen to show their faces to the new Ministers in order to continue to receive their benign treatment.

When I returned home that day, many people had come to my home for expressing their felicitations. In spite of the fact that curfew had been imposed in some parts of the town, people had come all the way from Srinagar to Hazratbal on foot to congratulate me.

The next day I went to the Secretariat and officials dropped in to introduce themselves and offer their congratulations. Tariq Abdullah also came to see me. He congratulated me for being the Minister of Tourism. Tariq is the younger brother of Dr. Farooq who had been appointed as Managing Director of the Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation by the Government during Sheikh Sahib's tenure as Chief Minister.

The whole city of Srinagar was filled with rumours to the effect that lakhs of rupees had been spent for toppling the Ministry of Dr. Farooq. Everywhere I went, I heard these statements being made by responsible citizens. I was upset by such talk because, clearly, accusations were conveyed through such rumours. As far as I know, nobody had either raised the question of money or ever come with an offering of money to me for buying my support. At no point of time did I have any idea or any knowledge to the effect that the Members of the Assembly had given their support to G.M. Shah in return for some consideration.

The first meeting of the Cabinet with G.M. Shah in the Chair was held on July 4, 1984. It was generally believed that Shah was

quite efficient in his work, and an able administrator. He would get things done expeditiously, particularly the projects in which he was interested. He had been Minister for Public Works for seven years during the tenure of Sheikh Abdullah as Chief Minister. A number of development projects were initiated and accomplished during the period. One could see the impact of such work visibly through the physical infrastructure that was being built everywhere in the state. The people had no doubt about his abilities and tough stances. Many referred to him as an "Iron man", and he was well known to every employee in the Government hierarchy. People generally held him in awe. This was mainly due to his short temper which could sometimes have unpleasant consequences.

On the other hand, there was another part of Shah's personality, a benign one. He was meticulous in his work; would go by the proper agenda in meetings and expedite decision making without wasting time. He attended to urgent tasks with attention. He was also generous in praise for employees doing a good job. In his loyalty to friends, he was exceptional and would care for those whom he befriended. He was loyal to his party workers and colleagues, not hesitating to go to any length in fulfilling their reasonable and even unreasonable requests. People were aware of this aspect of his personality and quite rightly they would describe him by the Kashmiri proverb which literally meant: "His face may be of steel, but his back is golden".

There was another meeting held by the Chief Minister a few days later in which the Members of his cabinet were introduced to the senior government functionaries. All of them were seated in a large meeting hall where all Cabinet Ministers and the Chief Secretary to the Government were also present. As the Chief Minister entered the hall his eyes fell on the Chief Secretary who was nonchalantly puffing at a cigarette. Shah Sahib flew into an instant rage and commented adversely about his smoking. The Chief Secretary, red in the face, immediately extinguished his cigarette. He had never expected such treatment in presence of his subordinate officers. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. I caught a glimpse of the other officers in the room and was

astonished to see them all shaky. Perhaps they were thinking, if this is what the Chief Secretary gets, their fate could be worse. I was distressed by such behaviour on the part of G.M. Shah.

An air bus was hijacked from the Srinagar airport during this period. The plane was forced to land at the Lahore airport in Pakistan's Punjab state. The incident became a highly sensitive issue for the whole nation and there was a furore in the media over the matter. Soon after this incident, I was called to Delhi in connection with a meeting of the Tourism Ministry at the Centre. I called on the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, on this occasion. Besides talking about matters related to Tourism and state politics, she herself raised the question of the hijacking incident and said:

"A Pakistani national was present in that flight. He had been in Srinagar and had made contact with Dr. Farooq and his group with the intention of plotting something. Mohi-ud-Din Shah and P.L. Handoo (two former colleagues in Farooq's Ministry) had gone to the airport to see off the Pakistani national". (Mr. Mohi-ud-Din Shah is nephew of G.M. Shah.) Hearing these words from the Prime Minister astounded me and I asked, "Mohi-ud-Din Shah and Handoo?" "Yes, of course. And the hijacking was planned to see that the gentleman safely landed in Pakistan", she replied.

Then I listened to her ideas on tourism and its development. She was keen about preserving the natural environment. I was still not entirely familiar with every aspect of my portfolio, so I benefited from her directions. On my return to Srinagar I got down to the task of hosting a meet on Mountaineering, convened by the Department of Tourism. Shri Khurshid Alam Khan presided over this meeting in his capacity as Minister of Tourism. Delegates from India and abroad participated in this meeting held in the S.K.I.C.C. near Hotel Centaur. G.M. Shah and I spoke at the meeting which decided about new schemes for the state, primarily about trekking, mountaineering and tourism.

The new government settled down to work. People had accepted the changes and were now looking forward to a dynamic admini-

stration for better results in those tasks which most affected their daily lives. All the same, political undercurrents had not fully settled in their new course.

One day Badhana Sahib called on me in my office. He was a Member of the Legislative Council (Upper House) of the J & K and a well known veteran and former General Secretary of the National Conference. We were quite well known to each other and, therefore, he spoke without hesitation:

"Whatever has happened thus far, let us forget. Please return back to our fold. We are quite sad about your change of sides. It's not too late."

"Whether I changed sides or not, it would have hardly mattered. This change had to take place. It was inevitable. Farooq himself is responsible for this", I replied.

"He is also aware about that. But, still you must come back to his group. I assure you, all will be set right", Badhana said.

"Are we playing a child's game? Changing sides on the flimsiest excuse does not appeal to me. Are you aware that I had not the least desire to go through all this?"

"I shall not go till I get an affirmation from you. What is your response finally, please let me know", he insisted on getting my positive response.

"Give me some time to think about all this", I told him, irritated. I could not however fathom what was the dire need for such a change in the tactics of N.C.(F)?

On the same day Dharamvir Singh Oberoi also met me at my residence. Since we had earlier worked closely together we knew each other well and could talk quite frankly and openly on any issue. He had also come with a similar proposal which earlier Badhana Sahib had broached with me. We discussed the matter and argued a lot. Ultimately, I told him that the changes that had taken place were now in the past and it would not be feasible to turn back the clock any more.

In the Legislative Assembly, swift changes were initiated to replace the Speaker Mr. Yattoo of the N.C.(F) with Mangat Ram Sharma of the Congress (I). With the support of the twenty six members of the Congress (I), the Shah group was already well

secured in the Assembly and deposing the Speaker through a vote of no confidence and electing M.R. Sharma to the speakership was no problem. Even before Mr. Yattoo could initiate any action against the thirteen Members for leaving the party, he was replaced by the new incumbent duly elected by us.

Sometime after the Shah government was in office, three more Members of the Assembly, namely, Jagjivan Lal, Rafiq Hussain Khan and G.M. Badarwahi of the N.C.(Farooq) came over and joined N.C.(Khalida). Both Rafiq and Jagjivan Lal were Ministers in Farooq cabinet earlier. A day before they joined us, I had met both of them at the Dachhigam Wildlife Park Guest House, where they had been in intimate conversation with Tariq Abdullah.

It was quite natural for Farooq Abdullah to be upset about the drastic turn of events. Therefore, as a consequence his one-point plan was to incite people against the new government. His speeches were full of hatred and criticism. As a result, the areas of downtown Srinagar where his political ally, Maulvi Farooq held the leash over his followers—witnessed regular skirmishes between the youth and police but mostly restricted to stones being pelted on the latter. G.M. Shah was however keen to see that not even a minor incident was allowed to escalate. Curfew was therefore imposed in these areas quite frequently. His contention was quite simple. Every life is precious and it is our duty to ensure that there is no loss of life on any account. "Life is priceless and no amount of money can bring back life, once extinguished", he said often. The government had therefore to impose curfew often to keep mischief-mongers in check, so much so that in the typical Kashmiri style Shah Sahib was readily given the title of "Gula Curfew". Later events, however, abundantly vindicated his stand in respect of the fundamental duty of the state to protect the life and liberty of every citizen at all costs and at all times.

As time went on we were creating closer ties with even those members of the Assembly who were supporting Dr. Farooq. Many thought that both the groups should merge together and let Shah play the leadership role for which he was well suited. Because the party was one till recently, members were known to each other well; besides Shah Sahib had spent the best part of his

life working with these people. Together they had faced many ordeals and he had shown the way on different occasions. Now that the same party was torn into two, everyone was concerned and anxious about the obvious dichotomy.

Both sides claimed that their group was the true inheritor of the legacy of Sheikh Abdullah. Although this was alright for argument's sake, the reality was that Farooq's group in the N.C. was the one in command of the major segment of the party. However, as time went along, more workers of the party joined our ranks and were to be seen hovering around the ministers and others connected with the Shah government. People were facing innumerable problems and their solution was possible only by the actions of the government in power. And as always, people rationalised their actions by saying that whether it is the brother or the sister, how does it matter? After all, they belong to the same clan!

In the month of August I paid a visit to Leh in Ladakh province of the state. It was difficult to resist the invitation given to me by Shri Namgyal, MLA from Ladakh. Besides, it was also important to examine how tourism in Leh could be given a boost. The people of Leh had made elaborate preparations for a nice reception in our honour. I was taken from the Leh airport to the venue of the public reception in a procession attended by the colourfully dressed people of the town. People of all ages had come to join the procession and were participating with enthusiasm. The women were particularly in evidence, having come out to see a woman Minister of the state, perhaps for the first time. There was a considerable amount of curiosity that brought them out.

Many political leaders of different party affiliations called on me at Leh. Their demand was unanimous for getting the people of Ladakh and Kargil the status of being classed as Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution enabling them to seek special concessions for their faster economic and educational development. The people of these two districts had agitated for long to get their demands accepted. These were genuine and I promised them that I would raise the issue in the cabinet and support their cause. Late

Shri Sonam Narboo, who belonged to Ladakh, and was a reputed government civil engineer by profession, had represented the interests of Ladakh in the earlier cabinet of Sheikh Abdullah. After his sad demise, his son Pinto Narboo had been actively involved in the politics of the region. Around the time of my visit, he was the President of the National Conference for Ladakh. He had earlier been a Member of the Farooq government.

After several leaders of the region discussed the political situation, it was unanimously decided that the district unit of the National Conference in Ladakh, would merge itself with the National Conference (Khalida group). The decision was publicly announced to a congregation of the people in the main bazar of Leh. Large number of people gathered on the occasion, welcomed the decision of their leaders with loud applause and appropriate slogans.

It was my good fortune at this time to be able to meet the venerable Kushak Bakula, the Head Lama of Ladakh. I cannot find words to describe the mental peace and solace I felt after meeting him. I felt completely at home with him, as if I found my spiritual abode for a while. I asked him a couple of questions about human existence. He laughed with such abandon that the whole place was fragrant with the aura of his spiritual virtues.

On my return from Leh, I went on a tour of Shangas area in the district of Anantnag. The MLA of this area Mohammad Maqbool Dar belonged to the Congress (I). During my visit I could personally see the widespread influence of the Congress (I) here. At the same time I was told that Jamat-i-Islami also had dominant pockets in the district. This was a rather paradoxical situation: a secular, national party on the one hand; and a narrow religious party on the other co-existing in places. I addressed a number of public meetings in many villages and came across some workers of the National Conference who had now joined the Khalida group of the party.

On 7th September 1984, I called on the Chief Minister at his home. The occasion was the festival of Bakr Id, and I had gone to say "Id Mubarak" to the Chief Minister. A large segment of the

elite businessmen of the city were gathered there, exchanging happy and joyful greetings with one another. These were the very same people who were earlier hovering around Begum Abdullah. And some of the big shots were the close relatives of the family. Also I noticed a much larger number of N.C. politicians and workers who had already shifted their loyalty and were now happily greeting Shah Sahib and others of his camp present on the spot.

Thereafter, it was a regular feature of our political work to meet people and party workers in meetings as well during our official tours. My colleagues in the cabinet who represented their respective constituencies were quite influential there. People from the villages come to meet their representatives without any hesitation and would get the minister's attention to the problems of the area. I paid visits jointly with my colleagues in their constituencies, thereby covering those areas represented by Hakim Yaseen, Ghulam Hassan Mir, Sona-ullah Dar, Ali Mohd. Naik, Rafiq Hussain Khan, Talib Hussain, Jagjivan Lal, and Dr. Mehboob Beg. The people were enthusiastic and forthcoming and wherever we went they were beholden to the Shah Government, welcoming us with the slogan "Long live Gulshah Padshah". There was a repeated clamour by the people for a visit to their areas by Begum Khalida Shah, the President of N.C.(K).

After the take over by the Shah government, the first major public meeting was arranged by the N.C.(K) in the Hawal area of downtown Srinagar on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway. In the meeting, many of us were present besides Khalida Shah and Ghulam Nabi Kochak. The people showered flowers and "shireen" (white sugar candy) over the head of Khalidaji and welcomed her warmly to the meeting. Women sang folk songs of welcome in her honour. Seeing her evoked the memories of late Sheikh Abdullah in the minds of the people. They shouted slogans like "Long live Sheikh Abdullah" spontaneously. Considering that this public meeting was held after prolonged curfew in the downtown area of the city, the response of the people to Khalidaji and the Shah government was quite warm and favourable.

In October, I had gone to Calcutta in connection with my official work. There I met the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu and apprised him of the political environment in the J & K state. He listened to me attentively but did not reveal his response at all.

Soon after my return from Calcutta I was taken ill and was confined to bed for sometime. While I was still ill, my private secretary, P.N. Ganjoo, came into my room panting and distressed. It was around 10.30 a.m. He told me that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had been assassinated!

"Mrs Gandhi is assassinated?"

I felt an arrow piercing through my chest.

"Who told you?", I questioned him in utter confusion. The news had spread like wild fire. The entire nation was in tears. People in Kashmir were deeply distressed. She had visited the valley for the last time just two days earlier. She had expressed her longing to watch the red chinar leaves falling slowly from the trees in the autumn. Throwing aside all caution, she had walked unescorted on the boulevard on the banks of the Dal Lake, talked to a handicrafts dealer in his shop and left behind beautiful memories for us to cherish. As if to bid her final good bye to the land of her ancestors, to her parental home—as Kashmiris liked to say—she had visited and prayed at the Dargah of Mukhdum Sahib, and the temple of Sharika on the Hariparbat hill. On that fateful occasion she had also called on Swami Laxman joo, the Shaivite saint of Kashmir at his ashram near Nishat Bagh. That evening was rather cold and there was a nip in the air. After spending sometime in quiet silence with Swamiji, she rose to leave.

"It's a little cold. You must take this shawl on your shoulders", said Swamiji to Madam Gandhi.

"There is no need, and how do I return the shawl to you?", she had said.

"You need not send it back. You please keep it", Swamiji had said while showering his blessings on her. People remembered these last moments of her life in Kashmir and wondered why fate had cut short the life of such a beloved one. There were a few people though, who had publicly demonstrated their jubilation

over this tragedy. The sadness over the tragedy was so overwhelming however, that most people took no notice of such reactions of a few.

We were glued to the television and participated in the last journey of Madam Gandhi paying a tearful homage to her. There were many processions of people all over and weeping crowds paid tributes to her glorious leadership role.

Soon after, the ashes of Indira Gandhi were carried all over the country in urns to be mingled with the local rivers in each state. The urn containing her last remains was brought into the compound of the old secretariat and placed there under the stone canopy for enabling people to pay their homage. Thousands of people went past the urn paying homage to her and bidding her the last farewell with tears in their eyes. People of all creeds, castes and religions were paying their homage to the departed leader. Besides the Chief Minister G.M. Shah, D.D. Thakur and I were given the task of carrying the urn for "darshan" of the people and its subsequent immersion.

Within a few hours after the death of Indira Gandhi, her son Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India. A couple of months later the elections to the Lok Sabha were declared to be held on 24th December 1984.

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, elections were to be held for the six parliamentary seats with three of these allotted to Kashmir, two to Jammu and one to Ladakh. As the election dates were declared there was hectic activity in political circles. The N.C.(Khalida) nominated Muzaffar Shah, son of Chief Minister G.M. Shah and Khalida Shah, as its candidate for the Srinagar Parliamentary constituency. N.C.(Farooq) nominated Begum Abdullah as its candidate who was to fight against Muzaffar Shah.

Religious appeals were used in this election in a mischievously contrived manner. The battle of the hustings was projected as a war between Islam and "Kufr". The Congress (I) and the N.C.(Khalida) combine was portrayed as the "Kufr" and the N.C.(Farooq) was the puritan of Islam. And the battle royal was given all the emotional coverings of religious sentiment.

Sometime before the declaration of elections Ghulam Nabi

Kochak had been inducted as a Minister in the G.M. Shah's cabinet. Now he was also made the Chairman of the N.C.(K) election campaign. For getting Kochak Sahib included into the cabinet, G.M. Shah had to face a lot of resistance. Dr. Mehboob Beg and Dilawar Mir were not at all in favour of this move. But G.M. Shah was also adamant, and he chose his own time for declaring him a member of his cabinet without caring what anyone thought about it.

Mehboob Beg and Kochak both belonged to district Anantnag. Dr. Beg was keen to nurse the constituency of his father, late Mirza Afzal Beg and make it his own with the least effort. Afzal Beg had a towering stature as a politician amongst the people. Even after his death he was remembered with affection. For this reason, perhaps Dr. Beg did not like anyone else to develop greater clout in the area. This of course was only my personal view.

Electioneering had gathered much momentum. During this period, on 10th December, I met Maulana Farooq at his residence in the late evening. His private secretary showed me into a room where I sat alone for a while. In a few minutes, however, the Secretary returned and said to me:

"Please come, he's waiting for you".

As he said so, I got up and followed him into another room. When I entered the room I saw Maulvi Farooq, dressed in a woollen gown, standing there alone. He wished me, saying "Adab Araz!". I returned the same greeting almost simultaneously. As I looked around in the room I observed there was only one chair in it, which was perhaps meant for him. Otherwise the room was furnished well with carpets and large round cushions. Before I took a seat anywhere, he bid me to sit down on the floor and he himself went straight for the chair. Such behaviour on his part annoyed me. I didn't however show; instead I pushed together a few of the round cushions one atop the other, and I sat on them next to his chair. Thus we were seated at the same level face to face with my back reclining against the wall. Suddenly he sounded somewhat apologetic as he said pointing to his back: "I have a slip disc. That's why I can't sit on the floor." Although, it

was late in the evening, he wore his dark glasses throughout our conversation. "I too have a back problem. That's why I need all this support." Hearing me speak, he laughed out loud which created an informal atmosphere. "I have come to request you to support Muzaffar Shah in the forthcoming elections". I said this to him quite directly.

"Didn't you have any other candidate in the party to contest this seat?", he asked.

"We have nominated him after considerable thought", I replied, trying to come straight to the point.

"I regard your personal visit very highly. We have had good relations with your family", he said emphasizing our closeness at the social level.

"If Zainlal is your 'maasi' (aunt from mother's side) she is also my 'chachi' (aunt from father's side)". I talked about his mother's sister whom I knew closely from childhood in my parental home.

"I must have played in the garden of your home many times in my childhood", he said, recollecting earlier family relationships.

"What is your decision?", I tried to get our conversation back to the elections in order to know his intentions.

"Please tell me how long are these people going to rule over us? First, it was the brother, now it is the sister? The reins of government are not likely to be freed from the grip of their family. After all, how long are we to tolerate this state of affairs?"

"People are devoted to the National Conference. This party has changed the face of Kashmir." As I said these words, he became quite agitated and said:

"Tell me, what has changed for the people? They have been herded and led like cattle and that too for the sake of ensuring their own personal power." I did not want to give any reply. He paused, thought for a moment, and said:

"I had sent a message to Khalidaji", he wanted to confirm if I knew about the message. I had understood him and I replied:

"She did send you a reply yesterday. Wasn't the reply satisfactory?" I enquired.

"You see, it's a matter of elections. Many people have got to

be motivated, and many others persuaded. Please do make her understand these urgent needs."

"Am I to understand that we depend on your solid support?", I said as I stood up to take leave.

"Insha Allah! Yes of course. Certainly!", he replied.

Next day, I learnt that Begum Abdullah had gone and met Maulana Farooq. And, most probably the purpose was also similar, namely seeking his support for a particular candidate in the Parliamentary elections.

Electioneering was conducted at a high pitch by all concerned. Many people met Shah Sahib and Khalidaji and assured them of their full support for the success of their son Muzaffar in the election. But the assurances were only in proportion to the money they could wangle. And this time they were collecting it from both the contesting sides!

In the Lok Sabha the Congress (I) came out as the winning party with the largest number of seats ever won by a single party. Rajiv Gandhi, who was also the President of the Congress (I) became the leader of the Parliamentary Party and took over as Prime Minister of the country. The two seats in Jammu were won by the Congress (I) and three seats in Kashmir were won by the National Conference (Farooq).

Immediately thereafter rumours were again in the air in Kashmir that the Shah Government not only will not last but will soon be dismissed. After the death of Madam Gandhi, the people were unaware of the attitude of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi towards the Shah Government. They were uncertain about the direction of the new political winds.

The secretariat was agog with gossip and speculation.

If Shah is removed, who will be the next incumbent? Will it be from the Congress (I) or any other?

The government officials were used to such frequent changes and conditions of uncertainty arising from the changes in the political leadership. This was however as much true of Jammu and Kashmir as of other states in the country. It is in the course of such rapid changes that the bureaucrats find an ideal opportunity to feather their own nests. There would be less work to do and

more personal favours to gain from shuttling ministers.

During this time, the Chief Minister alongwith Khalida Shah paid a visit to New Delhi. I talked to them on telephone, enquired about their engagements and informed them about the rumours prevalent in the city. The relations between G.M. Shah and the leaders of the Congress (I) in Kashmir were not fully harmonious. On the other hand, the relations with Congress (I) leaders from Jammu were very cordial and close. Shah took a keen interest in the parliamentary election of Janak Raj Gupta of the Congress (I) from Jammu. Also, his relations with other leaders were equally cordial. Probably this was a result of the respect shown to G.M. Shah by those people. Shah did not, however, hold the Congress (I) leaders from Kashmir in high esteem. While dealing with them his style was affected and constrained. He had a serious dichotomy in his mind because he felt rather forced to act in a certain way in political matters against his own wishes. These facts were well known to the people, and provided the basis for public speculation about the coming events.

Another aspect of Shah's nature was also quite relevant. This concerned his profound faith in the tenets of Islam in his personal life. Whatever the circumstances, he would offer his prayers five times a day. On many occasions he would take leave in the midst of a Cabinet meeting and return only after he had offered prayers, resuming the meeting which was held in abeyance during the short break.

The Shah government had ordered the arrest of Jamat-i-Islami chief, Syeed Ali Shah Geelani, immediately after taking charge. But during electioneering for parliamentary elections which followed, G.M. Shah declared the release of Geelani during a public meeting. The decision was announced by him without seeking the advice of his cabinet. Could it have been influenced by the fact that Geelani's release might swing votes in favour of Muzaffar Shah? Or could it be that he himself, being a good adherent of the tenets of Islam, would not like to be seen by the people as anti-Islam?

Geelani was now out of prison and he did not lose much time to make his emotionally rousing speeches against India leading to

mounting of public passions and poison of hatred. His theme song had been that there was a conspiracy to vanquish Islam from Kashmir. He would paint rosy pictures of the other side of Kashmir and link it up artfully with the need for establishing Nizam-e-Mustafa in the state.

On the release of Geelani from prison, resentment was shown by Governor Jagmohan. He reacted strongly to this decision of the Chief Minister which was evidenced by a strong letter he addressed him on the subject. This hurt G.M. Shah much, although he did not appear to attach any importance to the Governor's letter. Meanwhile, Geelani continued his tirade, and called upon people to rebel against Indian imperialism. At this juncture the government again decided to arrest Geelani for inciting people and creating disturbances.

From this time onwards the relations between the Governor and the Chief Minister were soured. Jagmohan became a vehement critic of the Shah Government. Jagmohan had been Lieut.-Governor of Delhi before and he had played a commendable, though sometimes controversial, role in the making of modern Delhi. It was widely believed by people in Srinagar and in Delhi that Jagmohan was very keen to have a good spell of Governor's rule in Jammu and Kashmir so that he could improve many things in the state and build a truly new Kashmir of his dreams. There were rumours again about imposition of Governor's rule. Shah Sahib returned from Delhi however, and the rumours were scotched. The government had moved to Jammu, the winter capital of the state, for the next six months. A relative of my colleague Dilawar Mir had come on a visit to the state. Ever since the partition of the country he had been living in Pakistan. One day I met him in the office of Dilawar Mir who introduced me to him. Apparently pleased to see me he said:

"Jammu and Kashmir has changed beyond recognition. I remember the people then, and now I see these beautiful mansions." He stroked his white beard, gently as he talked, recollecting the past.

"Why only talk about mansions? We have installed innumerable industries here", Dilawar Mir told his relative with obvious

pride.

"I have seen rows of boys and girls in uniforms going to schools here. It appears now there are no more illiterates in Kashmir. Besides, you also have a woman as Cabinet Minister! And she is a Kashmiri?", the gentleman from Pakistan said.

"Women work here in every capacity. They are also in the forefront in the villages. Didn't you notice this in Rafiabab (the native village of Dilawar Mir)?", Dilawar Mir said.

"I have not been happy about one aspect, though", the old man continued. "The women here have too much freedom. This is absolutely against the tenets of Islam. Such things cannot be tolerated in Pakistan."

I was irritated by his remarks. It showed on my face. I said: "Are the lady announcers on the Lahore T.V. borrowed from some other country? They outsmart the most fashionable in this place, don't they?"

He did not say anything. He quietly changed the subject.

When I returned to my office, I received a phone call from Maulana Farooq. After brief exchange of greetings he said:

"I had done my best during the elections. Still we did not succeed." I had not asked him about this topic. Without giving any importance to what he said, I replied, "Let us forget about these old matters. Please tell me the purpose of your call?"

"How can we forget these things? We have got to work together in future as well". He paused a while and continued again, "There is a relation of mine in the Education Department. His case for transfer is awaiting decision by Mr. Naik, Education Minister. I have spoken to him just now. Please remind him about the case. I am requesting you as my sister?" This time he did not appear to have the need to camouflage his voice. I guessed he was not wearing his dark glasses either. "Please rest assured, your work shall be done. I keep my promises", I replied. As he listened, he responded with loud laughter and said: "Do you mean to say that I do not keep mine?"

I went on an official visit to Goa and Bombay. Goa was beautiful,

and I was particularly taken in by its seascape. The sea is so far off from Kashmir that the vast expanse with its numerous roaring waves instantly attracted and won my heart. The Almighty had used its innovative genius in creating this paragon of beauty. Everything appeared right and beautiful in its own place. Nothing seemed unimportant or out of place. Whereas, in Ladakh the mountains of bare sandy rock had their own charm, the waves rushing over and kissing the sandy beaches in Goa had their distinct beauty. The waves seemed to proclaim the moment of eternal embrace of love as they lashed on the sandy beaches in poetic rhythm. I shall never forget the sunset on the sea. As the sun sank slowly into the horizon, the sea was tinted a deep crimson as if the setting sun was melting itself and dissolving its hues into the vast ocean.

I visited the Mangesh temple in Goa the next day. The temple is situated a few kilometres away from Panaji and we passed through small and clean villages. There appeared to be a good synthesis of these parts and many churches and temples were visible on the landscape. People wore modern dresses. I found people very fond of the home-made alcoholic drink, Feni.

The Mangesh temple is an ancient Shiva temple. The priest inside was happy to welcome us and said:

"Sometime ago the Chief Minister of Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah had visited here."

"Oh!, I see."

"He (Farooq) had said that people of Kashmir live in the mountains and that is why they worship Shiva", the priest wanted to impress me with his familiarity with Kashmir.

"Kashmiris have Lord Shiva as the chief deity. Otherwise, we worship all the other manifestations of the lord, 'Devis' and 'Devtas'. But the worship of Shiva has a special importance."

"Farooq Abdullah had said that his grandfather or great grandfather was a Kashmiri Brahmin. And he was a worshipper of Shiva", the priest informed me.

"It might have been so", I said.

"You see here, please, in this book he has signed his name."

He had quickly gone and brought the guest book to show me the signature of Dr. Farooq and said:

“You may wish to sign here please.”

“Yes, of course, I shall”, and I signed my name in the visitors book.

On my return from Goa, I called on M. L. Fotedar who was the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister at that time. I was meeting him for the second time. His small room had a few chairs and a number of telephone receivers, which were buzzing or ringing every few seconds. Fotedar, no doubt, bid me to take my seat, but he did not question me about the purpose of my visit. His tone of conversation on the telephone conveyed the impression that the whole world could come to naught without his instructions. I got the impression that at one moment he was talking on the line to either a Chief Minister of a state or some eminent leader of the Congress (I) or maybe some Cabinet Minister. Everyone seemed to be seeking appointments to meet Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi for some urgent business. After waiting for sometime silently, I expressed a desire to take leave to go, but he did not want me to leave so soon. Could it be that he wanted me to witness how important he was and how the entire Darbar at Delhi was at his command? Finally I took leave; I left with a strange feeling and was reflecting on the variety of false pretences.

G.M. Shah had begun to receive mixed response from the urban elite, and his outbursts of temper caught the rather adverse attention of the media resulting in critical comment. Even the proceedings of the cabinet meetings became the headline news of the local newspapers. And there was enough material because Shah Sahib had from time to time a few tiffs with the Chief Secretary, Dilawar Mir, Sheikh Jabbar, Dr. D. D. Thakur, Gurbachan Kumari Rana, and some Congress (I) leaders. At one point there were even angry exchanges with Arun Nehru then Cabinet Minister in the Central Government.

The leaders of the state Congress (I) were very keen to bring about a merger of the National Conference (Khalida) with their own party. Thereby the Congress (I) would become a full partner in the state government, rather than merely supporting the Shah

government from outside. However, G.M. Shah and some of his party colleagues were not in favour of such merger. The Congress (I) was getting rather perturbed about the growing clout of the N.C.(Khalida) with the public at large. This had alarmed the Congress (I) leaders and as a consequence, differences began to surface over trifling issues. The impatience of the Congress (I) and their ambition for sharing power were too obvious. Because they were supporting the government, their wavering attitudes led to the prevailing apprehension about the fall of the Shah government which appeared imminent.

On the other hand, it was not right on Shah's part to rub his own colleagues on the wrong side rather frequently. The people would very soon get wind of these skirmishes and the government employees would concoct more rumours about the situation, creating further uncertainty in the public mind.

Even though the people perceived G.M. Shah as a stickler for discipline, the public manifestation of this trait of his was not always a pleasant one. He seemed to get some vicarious pleasure by pulling up people in public for trivial things. I am reminded of innumerable such instances where he embarrassed many senior officers in public. I could not see any rationale behind such disrespectful behaviour. It upset me to witness such incidents, I would even venture to advise Shah Sahib about the need for restraint in public. In one instance the entire I.A.S. lobby got quite worked up because one officer of the cadre was admonished for wearing jeans during working hours. In our country the British sense of dress still causes confusion in many minds about what is proper dress and what is not. For those in politics anything is passe, whereas for the officers, the colonial norms would still be inflicted by the new rulers!

This one trait of his personality was largely responsible for keeping both friend and foe away from Shah. Often, however, he would be back to normal in a jiffy to be at his sweetest best. But, the first response would have often done irreparable damage by causing great disappointment to the person meeting him.

Strangely, Shah's personality exhibited two distinct traits. One was his irritable temper. The other was his humaneness and

respect for loyal friends and colleagues. If his worker was in need of help G.M. Shah would not rest till his work was done. He would see to it that he was present with his friends and colleagues in times good or bad sharing his good wishes, concerns or condolences as the occasion demanded. Equally, he was loyal to a fault to his officers who worked well and hard.

Inspite of the disinformation campaign against the government, there was a growing base of support for N.C.(K). I went to the constituencies of Talib Hussain and Rafiq Hussain Khan on an official tour. There we found a good scope for the development of tourism. The landscape was beautiful, in particular, the districts of Poonch and Rajouri in the south west of the state, and Suwamkot, Noori Chhamb; Dera Gali Khan, and Thana Mandi were well worth such development. The areas were largely inhabited by Gujjar population whose livelihood depended on animal husbandry and dry land farming. During this tour we had to move about on horseback in order to meet people in their hamlets. We were welcomed in a large beautiful house built atop a high hill. The house, which belonged to a local political veteran, was of solid modern cement construction and was comparable in design and elegance to any house in the larger cities of the state. And because it was built so high up on the mountain, its cost would be easily thrice that of a house in the plains. On the downhill, plateau, directly below this house was the habitation of the Gujjar population whose hamlets were of traditional construction; stone and mud huts protruding elegantly from the mountainside, looking as if these are carved out of the mountain.

The men in these clusters of hamlets looked healthy and wore neat warm clothing. I was distressed however, to see the women and children dressed in poor worn out clothes, shivering in the cold. These issues were pointedly raised in my discussion with Talib Hussain and others. The need for massive development efforts in these backward regions was obvious.

Tariq Abdullah, who was the Managing Director of Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation (JKTDC), put up a proposal to me for his visit abroad in connection with develop-

ment of tourism. The budget of the JKTDC was running in a deficit and before I could sanction his tour, I deemed it proper to clear the proposal with the Chief Minister. Because of Tariq's close relationship with his sister Khalida and her husband, the Chief Minister himself, the matter was rather sensitive. As I explained the proposal and its ramifications to Shah Sahib he said without any hesitation:

"When there are no funds in the Corporation, how can he afford to go?" He paused a while and added:

"Of course, please be somewhat careful. He is quite temperamental, and can be nasty with anybody". These remarks annoyed me but I did not show it.

"This is not my personal matter. And so far as his temperament is concerned, I will handle it". I left the room immediately.

Abdul Samad Teli (MLA) was taken ill at Jammu and he was immediately hospitalized. He belonged to N.C.(Farooq) but I knew him very well, not only as my colleague in the National Conference, but also as a neighbour. Besides, I have had a close personal rapport and understanding with him on political issues. I went to look him up in the hospital where I met his wife and other relatives. They were pleased to see me. This small incident had to be recounted here in order to highlight the petty levels to which politicians of our day have brought personal relations amongst themselves. According to the prevalent culture of rivalry, political vendetta, and wreaking vengeance, I was not expected to even see Teli Sahib, not to speak of talking to him. I had made it abundantly clear though to Shah Sahib that I did not subscribe to such an approach which allowed political differences to tarnish personal relations. Sadly, however, I must also record the fact that Abdul Samad Teli did not muster sufficient courage to be by my side when subsequent events required him to do so. This shall perhaps change, as it should, as time improves our political, democratic culture.

On my return from the hospital I went to attend a dinner hosted by the Chief Minister in honour of the C-in-C of the Army, General Vaidya and his wife. Cabinet Ministers and senior officers of the government were present. Mrs. Khalida Shah was at

her prettiest best as the hostess on the occasion, and Madam Vaidya paid her a handsome compliment for being so pretty even while she was already a grandmother. Khalidaji was quietly and unobtrusively making an impact on events and largely balancing her husband's obtuse public relations by her polite and humble ways.

In connection with my official duties, I had to visit Amritsar and Chandigarh in Punjab. D.D. Thakur, the Deputy Chief Minister, had advised me to avoid going through Punjab in my car. This was quite understandable in view of the grim law and order situation in the state after the "Operation Blue Star". However, I did travel on the tour by car. There was no problem encountered by us en route. All the towns we passed through appeared peaceful and normal with shops open and business going on according to schedule even in the fields. All the time I was wondering why the media could not paint the true picture of a situation instead of highlighting only the worst aspects which distorts the truth and helps only those people who feed on disinformation, and on the apprehensions of the people. While in Jammu, I have had the feeling that Punjab must indeed be like a cauldron of boiling oil. It was not that bad. At Amritsar, I prayed in the Golden Temple and the Durgyana Mandir, according to tradition. The next day I visited Attari on the India-Pakistan border. Every day at sunset a special ceremony is held at this point on the border and as usual people from either side came to witness the function. When the formal ceremony was over, the gate at the border was opened for a brief while. Some women from the Pakistan side who were allowed to cross over came curiously towards me. When they realized that I was a Minister, their enthusiasm was even greater and each one of them warmly embraced me. Thereupon, we shouted together slogans on India-Pakistan friendship. In a few brief sentences I told the small gathering:

"Let us pray to God Almighty that these gates between our countries may remain open for ever so that we might meet each other easily." In reply they repeated the words "Insha Allah! Insha Allah!" with enthusiasm.

In Chandigarh I was delighted to meet Nek Chand the famed

artist of Chandigarh's Rock Garden. He showed keen interest in our request to help with his expertise and time to set up a very special garden in Kashmir as a major tourist attraction. I invited him to visit Kashmir which he readily accepted.

On February 22nd, when I was returning from Chandigarh to Jammu in the Indian Airlines flight, I found G.M. Shah returning from Delhi in the same plane. He looked very happy and satisfied. A few days earlier he had invited Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to a special dinner at the Kashmir House in Delhi. The dinner was a feast laid out in the Kashmiri "Wazwan" style, where four persons partake the delicacies from a large common plate in a gesture of true sharing of food. At this feast, Rajiv Gandhi followed the customary practice and had joined in the shared meal with G.M. Shah and others. The event was well publicized by the Govt. and independent media showing the Prime Minister with Shah in a mood of bonhomie in a memorable photograph.

Shah had told me in the course of the flight that the meeting had been highly significant in that all the irritants had been put aside in the larger interests of the state. With these developments, those who were wishing for the downfall of the Shah government were silenced for the time being.

I paid a visit to Bangalore in connection with the work of the development of tourism. There I met R.K. Hegde, Chief Minister of Karnataka. He invited me to his home for dinner. I was happy to discover that besides being active in politics, Shri Hegde is also a lover of art and music. I was quite pleased to meet at his home some artists. Shri Hegde also discussed the political situation in Jammu & Kashmir with me and I apprised him about the various developments.

Around this time the then Vice President of India, His Excellency R. Venkataraman (now President of India) wanted to pay homage at Mata Vaishnav Devi shrine in Katra, Jammu. We received him at the Jammu airport with a very warm welcome. Later he was the honoured guest at a government luncheon given in his honour at Bagh-i-Bahu on the slopes of Bahu Fort at Jammu. Cabinet Ministers, officers of the armed services and senior officials of the government were present on the occasion.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned that Bagh-i-Bahu was a landmark garden created by the Public Works Department of Jammu under the leadership of G.M. Shah as Minister for Public Works and Development during the tenure of Sheikh Abdullah as Chief Minister. Shah had taken personal interest in creating this memorable park for the citizens of the state as well as for the lakhs of tourists who visit Vaishnov Devi cave temple every year.

After the lunch the Vice President went for a "darshan" of Vaishnov Devi cave temple. He went in a helicopter and was accompanied by Governor Jagmohan. The Chief Minister, Dy. Chief Minister D.D. Thakur and I were seated in another helicopter and we went ahead of them and landed at the helipad in order to formally welcome and escort their excellencies to the shrine. After formalities at "Sanje Chhat" helipad, the Vice President and G.M. Shah proceeded to the cave on horseback. Governor Jagmohan, D.D. Thakur and I went upto the cave temple on foot. The Vice President was very pleased with the visit which was evident from his happy and jovial mood at the Jammu airport where we saw him off to Delhi, immediately after our return from the shrine.

The Rural Housing Development Centre of the National Buildings Organisation, Govt. of India, had built a cluster of low cost housing for the rural poor near Udhampur. The Minister for Housing, G.M. Badarwahi was invited to hand over the houses to the beneficiaries in a village near Udhampur. I was also invited to the function. The people were enthusiastic and happy to see a positive phase of development taking shape. Badarwahi addressed the rural audience and explained to them the policies for growth and development chosen by Shah government and the help received from the Centre in these efforts.

In fact the pace of development was quickened all over the state. The government decided the pending cases of over eight thousand daily wage earners of the Public Works Department and other agencies which was causing a lot of distress to people who had put in long years of service without any accruing benefits. Their services were regularized whereby they became entitled to benefits of pension and provident fund etc. Many new projects for

Power Development and other works of Tourism and Industrial Development were taken up. Every MLA, irrespective of his political affiliation, was happy to see developmental activity initiated in every constituency. Roads, schools, and medical dispensaries were taken to rural areas where nobody had paid attention earlier. However, as the pace of such activity increased, there would be some political roadblock. This might not always be impossible to handle but quite often it certainly was difficult. And the major roadblock was due to the unseemly clash of human egos.

Dilawar Mir had an unprecedented skirmish with the Chief Minister and the squabble snowballed so much that the fall of the Ministry seemed imminent. The matter was trivial but their egoistic attitudes exaggerated the incident. Media persons are always on the look out for such stuff, so the matter got reported in newspaper headlines. They had quarrelled in presence of Khajuria, Director General of Police of the State. The fireworks caused by their anger were so intense that anything would have been consumed by it. It was a deeply disquieting and sad episode.

The local press was well disposed towards Shah in the beginning, but ever since he fell out with Ved Bhasin, the outspoken and fearless Editor of the *Kashmir Times*, the honeymoon with the press was over, resulting in a spate of criticism of his government.

For several days Dilawar Mir did not attend office. Many friends and party colleagues intervened to remove the misunderstanding. Later on I was quite surprised though when I met them again after a few days in a very jovial mood together and laughing hilariously, as if nothing had ever happened before! Such is the stuff of politics.

While the government was about to shift to the summer capital Srinagar, G.M. Shah was preparing to leave, accompanied by his wife, for the religious pilgrimage of "Umra" in West Asia. Thereafter, they had both to visit their son in the USA. In the absence of the Chief Minister from the state, Deputy Chief Minister D.D. Thakur officiated as the Chief Minister of the state. Thakur was reputed to have a unique working style. With his sweet temper

and empathy he was readily able to make friends, influence people and win them over. He was also well known for his intellectual acumen, administrative ability and capacity for understanding and solving problems. From my personal experience I found that Thakur Sahib did not only possess a brilliant mind but he also was friendly and outgoing and after a day's work was always in the company of his many friends. He went as far as he could in helping friends without much fanfare. Such selfless attributes are very rare in the present day. The other side of his personality was equally noticeable. He could be truly nasty and unforgiving towards those who crossed his path or showed malice or animosity against him.

Even before the government had moved to Srinagar, Dr. Farooq together with Maulana Farooq had given a call for a "bandh" in Srinagar. People including shopkeepers had been advised to stay in their homes. One day prior to the "bandh" of the local traders, Chamber of Commerce, and Trade Union leaders and others met at his official residence. These people had been convinced by Thakur's words about the undesirability of the "bandh" and had expressed their satisfaction over governmental action. They had also resolved to make the "bandh" unsuccessful. On the date the offices in Srinagar were to open i. e. 6th May 1985, the "bandh" was only partial and a tame affair. Shops in the main city were mostly open. However, there was a good response to the "bandh" call in the downtown Srinagar. The offices worked normally. The Cabinet met under the chairmanship of D.D. Thakur, which was followed by a Press Conference also addressed by him.

On May 13th, however, Srinagar was again in the grip of turmoil. The Calcutta High Court had given some verdict on the Holy Quran which was considered sacrilegious by the local Muslims. There was a protest march organised by the Jamat-i-Islami and the Awami Action Committee. From time to time, these parties would keep the fire of protests and demonstrations burning in Kashmir on one pretext or the other, irrespective of the fact that the incident might have taken place anywhere in the world. Anything concerning Islam would provide an opportunity

for them to exhibit Islamic brotherhood and unity and they would always be eager to be in the vanguard of such protests.

I am reminded of the unfortunate incident around 1967-68 in which there was a violation of the Al-Aksa mosque by the Israelis. This news had created a deep stir amongst the people and the resulting mob fury was unprecedented. Misguided and emotionally surcharged youth had taken on any European tourists they found and beaten them to pulp. All the foreign tourists in Srinagar ran for their lives and promptly left the town. Many hid themselves up for days. Even the nuns of the Convent and the teachers of the Burn Hall School, the two missionary schools in Srinagar, had to hide and keep away from the fury of the mobs.

Pakistan had waged three wars against India in 1947, 1965 and 1971 with the objective of grabbing Kashmir in which it had not succeeded. Just as the politicians of Pakistan were not as yet reconciled to the legal fact of inalienable accession of Jammu and Kashmir State to India in 1947, similarly a determined group of people has been active in the valley of Kashmir sowing the seeds of secession. They had always believed that some day or the other, they would be able to secede Kashmir from India and make it a part of Pakistan. They have always attempted to play the Islamic card and rouse the emotions of the people in order to veer them towards their political thinking. These groups have never had any sizable presence to be of any political significance, but with the flow of foreign money, some of these outfits had mushroomed and developed some clout over the years.

At the same time, elsewhere in the country there were reports of communal violence which provided these groups enough argument for justifying their own existence in the state. The Awami Action Committee of Maulana Farooq had entrenched itself within the National Conference grassroots, thereby suppressing N. C.'s secular outlook and replaced it by its own parochial approach. Whereas, Maulana Farooq was keen to use the National Conference platform for his own capture of power, Dr. Farooq was bent upon dismantling the Shah Government with the support of Awami Action Committee. Their objectives were almost identical, namely, to snatch the reins of power into their own hands.

Both of them were trying to use one another in this game.

On May 17th, Dilawar Mir solemnized his second marriage. Everyone of his colleagues had been present on the occasion. My conscience did not allow me to participate in this function. I was quite sad to think why he needed to marry again, while his first wife was healthy and alive and the children grown up. I was aware that Muslim Personal Law allows having more than one wife, nevertheless, I felt compassion and empathy for his first wife. However, when I had the occasion to meet his second wife some-time later, I found her to be a beautiful, polite and cultured person.

On the 18th we had a meeting and we discussed the party's preparations for the welcome of G.M. Shah and Khalida from their sojourn abroad. Thakur Sahib had persuaded many traders associations, trade union leaders, association of house boat owners and others to attend the party deliberations as invitees. They offered their fullest support and it was resolved that a grand reception will be given to the Chief Minister on his return to the state.

On the day of their arrival I saw long columns of people moving from the city to the airport. They were going in buses, taxis, scooters and on foot. The noise and the dust raised by the vehicles and people seemed as if the whole town was on the move. I was astounded to see the spectacle. G.M. Shah and Khalida arrived on time and were carried to a well-decorated stage where they were seated. The airport lawn was filled with people. The leaders of various unions and associations garlanded the couple profusely in a gesture of grand welcome. Thereafter, both were carried in a massive procession from the airport to Iqbal Park, where a large gathering was already awaiting their arrival. Shah made a powerful speech telling the people about his experience of the holy "Umra" and thanking them for the warmth of their welcome. As I returned home I gave a lift to a businessman who was connected with the National Conference and was now with the N.C.(K). En route he told me:

"Shah Sahib is not new to politics. People know it well that he achieves what he says he will. And, Khalida is no stranger either. She was a pet child of Sheikh Sahib."

"There was a huge crowd, were you there?", I asked.

"I was in the 'pandal'. You couldn't have noticed me in this crowd. Today, people have opened their hearts. They know who is their saviour." I did not know whether he said this to please me or that he really felt that way. After a brief pause, he spoke again.

"And, of course, these masses of people are with everybody. Don't you remember what late Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed (Prime Minister of Kashmir 1953-64) used to say?"

"What did he say?" I asked him.

"When a senior leader at the Centre asked Bakshi, what number of the population favoured his political stand? He had replied: 'Forty lakhs are with me.' The leader had then pointedly asked him about the number of followers of Sheikh Sahib. Do you know what Bakshi replied?"

"What?"

"The same number: forty lakhs."

"The leader then asked Bakshi that forty lakhs was the population of the whole state. How can the same number follow both leaders? Kashmir's Prime Minister Bakshi had readily said: 'That's precisely the paradoxical truth about the people.' "

During this year many tasks were accomplished without any hassles. Many new schemes were undertaken for the promotion of tourism industry in the state. A "Floating Restaurant" was launched on the Dal Lake. It was a modern version of the recreational use of Doonga boats which is a common Kashmiri pastime on summer weekends.

These boats are hired by families or groups of families for sailing around on the waterways for a few days. Food is cooked in the boat in the same way as on festive occasions. Often people halt the boats at some places of religious significance situated on the banks of river or lake, or visit tourist gardens on the Dal Lake or the Manasbal lake. With the advent of the motor car and the bus, however, such recreational activity is becoming a thing of the past.

My son, Bharat, was married around this time and the reception on this occasion had to be given at "Iftahar" (the time for breaking of the daily Ramadan fast) so that my colleagues could

also join the festivity. Ever since Sheikh Sahib had resumed charge of the government in 1975, it had become customary to stop smoking and mid-day tea etc. in the Secretariat as a mark of respect for Sheikh Sahib who religiously kept his fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Even G.M. Shah was a stickler for such discipline with even greater zeal. Naturally others had followed suit and even non-Muslims would show restraint in order not to hurt others. Some senior executives of Tata Steel were on a visit to Srinagar to attend a conference. A dinner was arranged by them in honour of the Chief Minister in the Floating Restaurant. Khalida and I were also invited. Many suggestions were explored for the promotion of tourism in the state. Khalida has a cheerful and charming personality. Therefore, she was the recipient of much attention from the hosts. I could see G.M. Shah occasionally sending signals of disapproval to his wife for such openness with others. I was seated by her side and I talked to her on the subject. Together we laughed over the narrowminded attitudes of the males in India about their female partners.

In the midsummer of 1985, there were rumours floated in Srinagar that the N.C.(K) was being merged with the Congress (I). I first got the wind of such a change from Ashok Gehlot, who then held the portfolio of tourism in the Central Government, and had come to Srinagar on official work. Also, many leaders of the N.C.(K) namely D.D. Thakur, Sonaulah Dar, Dilawar Mir, Mehboob Beg and some others favoured this course. However, many others did not approve of this change. On the other hand, many workers of the Congress (I) were joining the N.C.(K), and some members of the Assembly belonging to N.C.(Farooq) were keenly waiting to join Shah. Under these changing political circumstances of growing power of N.C.(Khalida), the N.C.(Farooq) and Congress (I) leadership were bent upon showing Shah Government in poor light. The State Congress (I) expected that after the merger they would dominate the government, after seeing Shah rehabilitated as a Minister in the Central Cabinet, or even as a Governor of a State. To what extent such plans were thought of at the highest level is difficult for me to say. The fact, however, is that these alternatives were bandied about even at the state cabinet

level. M.L.As of the Farooq group were frequently coming to meet Shah Sahib in connection with the problems of their respective constituencies. They were quite keen to see all the workers and leaders of the National Conference brought together again under one banner. They were convinced that Shah had the ability and administrative acumen to hold the reins of government efficiently. At this time I visited Delhi for some official work. I paid a courtesy call on Congress (I) leaders. Ghulam Nabi Azad was one amongst them whom I found to be a person of enlightened approach and openness. He was polite in conversation and showed keen interest in the various aspects of tourism development in the state. We also talked informally and he showed me a photograph and asked:

"Tell me, who is in this photograph?" I saw the picture and recognized it was of his wife. She with a "bindi" on her forehead and a "dejharoo" hanging from her ears. This golden ornament, "dejharoo" is worn by married Kashmiri women as an insignia of marriage, so to say. "Why, of course. She is your wife. Who doesn't know Shamima as a famous artist. Am I right?" I replied with some little doubt still in my mind, because of the ornament in her ears which is now worn by Hindu women only.

"You are correct. How does she look in this attire?", he asked me. "She looks fabulous in this attire, particularly with the 'dejharoo'," I replied.

"Well, its a special feature of being Kashmiri."

I also called on Mekhla Jha and L. K. Jha. They made enquiries about the political situation in Kashmir. In particular, I could see Mrs. Jha had developed a close affinity for the people of the state and interest in their welfare. She enquired about the progress of the schemes she had initiated a few years earlier. She also incidentally expressed the view that I should have dealt with the portfolio of Social Welfare because of the experience I have had in this assignment. On this occasion I also apprised H.K.L. Bhagat of the Congress (I) with the political situation in the state. Sometime after he also took over the portfolio of Tourism and Civil Aviation in the Union Government, at which time I met him more frequently. On July 17, 1985, the Legislative Assembly

became the scene of rowdy exchanges amongst some legislators. I do not recollect the issue over which the skirmish began. But, I do well remember that the legislators nearly came to blows. A.G. Lone, MLA, who was an independent, had an argument with Rafiq Hussain Khan, MLA of N.C. (Khalida). Two warring groups collected round them and hotly exchanged accusations and counter charges against each other. In this unseemly quarrel, Rafiq Hussain was wounded. Abdul Ghani Lone was also hurt. The proceedings of the Assembly were adjourned by the Speaker because of the unruly scenes and uncivilized behaviour by some members on the floor of the house. In the meanwhile the members who were hurt were given first-aid. Later, when I went to call on the Speaker both the Honourable(!) members were present there. Mild arguments and protestations were still going on in an atmosphere charged with hate, anger and passion. I said somewhat vehemently: "We have no right to call ourselves leaders or pretend to be so. We must be ashamed of our behaviour. What impressions do people gather about us from such episodes?"

"This isn't a new development. Such things happen here. You are new to all this, but you will get used to all this soon enough", the Speaker told me.

In the month of August "Indira Jyoti" was brought to Srinagar after it had been carried through the other states in the country. The team carrying the "Jyoti" was led by Anand Sharma, President of the Youth Congress (I). The "Jyoti" was placed in the Congress (I) headquarters office in Srinagar. In connection with the function organized by their party, I went to the Congress (I) office where I met Mufti Mohd. Sayeed, then President of the Jammu and Kashmir Congress (I). (Mufti Sahib parted from Congress (I) and formed the Jan Morcha. Later he was Union Home Minister in the Janta Dal Government formed at the Centre in January 1990. The Janta Dal Government ended in Nov. 1990 due to loss of support in the Parliament.) I met Mufti Sayeed in his office in this old building. The office was in a poor condition and the furniture was also old and worn out. The room was not even clean. Mufti Sahib showed me considerable courtesy and politeness but he appeared to be somewhat hesitant and not forth-

coming in conversation. I did not know him too well then and had merely exchanged formal greetings a few times earlier. There was a lot of activity in these premises and a large number of people came to pay homage to the "Jyoti". Later, when the Indira Jyoti was leaving Srinagar it was given an official send off. I accompanied the procession upto Pampore seated in the same jeep with Anand Sharma and one of his colleagues. As we were moving ahead we sighted a white Ambassador car with a green flag carrying the crescent moon and star symbol racing ahead of us. As Anand Sharma saw this he was somewhat startled and said:

"This is the Pakistani flag. Whose car is this?" Before I could reply, the driver of the jeep intervened and said:

"This is Maulana Farooq's car. He must be visiting someone around here."

"But isn't this a Pakistani flag? Who had allowed him to use this flag here?" Anand Sharma wanted to know.

"This flag is the religious flag of Islam. He has been using this flag for a long time now", I replied.

Some foreign delegations came to visit Srinagar in connection with tourism. I had occasion to meet these people officially. I had a strange feeling about a Russian delegation. They were quite reticent in their responses and would not be specific or sure of their replies. Although I did not know Russian, I had the benefit of my friend Mrs. Maria Murti who knew Russian and acted as an interpreter for me. Maria was born in Russia but married an Indian, Prof. Ram Murti. Another notable observation was that on mundane matters these people were quite open and full of humour and laughter. "Perestroika" and "Glasnost" were not as yet the buzz words of Russian life. When I had enquired from Maria about the reasons for such attitudes she told me: "In this delegation everyone must be keeping an eye on everybody else. So they are afraid and apprehensive about saying the wrong thing in case the conversation becomes long and open."

One day I was going in my car to an urgent meeting. After a short while, in the midst of a street the car suddenly came to a halt. I was reading a book which fell off from my hands. Somewhat startled, I looked out of the window. I noticed that alongside

our car from another vehicle Surraya Mattoo, sister of Dr. Farooq, was setting out. She walked over to my car and addressed the driver rudely:

"You don't have eyes to see? Can't you make out what you're doing? Come out of the car and I shall teach you a lesson", she said.

"What is the matter?" I asked my driver. I hadn't quite understood what had happened.

"Take care. You dare not repeat that again. Beware. We shall see those people too who move about in these cars", she was trembling as she said that and went back into her car. Before my car moved on I said with obvious irritation:

"She'll see us? Who does she think she is?"

By this kind of behaviour Surraya perhaps wanted to attract attention of the people to witness the skirmish and hoped that people would support her. But the shopkeepers around there did not consider it prudent to get into this affair. When I asked the driver what had happened, he said that while she was overtaking, her car must have got a scratch with mine.

Soon after taking over as Minister of Tourism in the Union Ministry, Shri H.K.L. Bhagat visited Kashmir. I accompanied him on a visit to the Vaishnov Devi shrine. Some proposals for the beautification and development of this tourist-cum-cultural centre were discussed with him in order to seek direct Central assistance for the project. He was also pleased to see the development of Bagh-i-Bahu and had approved grants for its growth and extension as a tourist attraction in Jammu.

I accompanied Shri Bhagat on a visit to Gulmarg as well. He was to inaugurate the India Tourism Development Corporation Hotel there. On the following day he visited Pahalgam. His wife also joined us on this leg of the tour. Schemes for Central assistance were approved for further development of Pahalgam.

During these few days I had the occasion to closely observe Bhagatji and get to know his views on many issues. Also, I could see how he dealt with people and political issues. He stood out as a person who showed considerable respect for his wife and her opinions on many matters. He would tenderly look after her needs

and keep her happy. During our conversation he ruminated over the events of bygone days and vividly described to me how he had migrated from Pakistan to India at the time of partition and lived in the refugee camps. He described their personal lives, about how after deciding to marry, they had to wait for a long time to do so. While we talked, his wife joined the conversation. Both husband and wife were affable people; Mrs. Bhagat indeed seemed to me to be more so. We talked about politics, our social problems and personal matters. One statement of his, however, is deeply engraved in my memory. He had said:

"In politics you must beware of one thing. You should never raise your head above that of the leader. If you happen to do that, you could be finished."

As I asked him more about his political experience the topic of our conversation naturally moved towards Indira Gandhi. I perceived from his talk that he had been a beneficiary of her grace right upto the last days of her life. He said:

"One day I had casually mentioned to Indiraji that only Rajiv Gandhi can lead the Congress (I) and the nation. No one else can fit the bill."

"What was Madam Gandhi's response to your statement?", I asked him.

"Her response? Well! She looked at me as if to indicate that I hadn't said the right thing. She raised her eyebrows and her face was tense; she asked me to repeat what I had said. I was rather afraid, wondering whether she was pleased or annoyed over this statement; with some hesitation, I repeated that . . . Rajiv Gandhi alone could be Prime Minister of India. When my eyes met those of Madam Gandhi, I saw that she had understood and had approved my statement and was pleased with it. That did the trick. It was more than I desired," he said. He removed the bullet proof jacket he was wearing.

"There is no need for this here? One gets weary of its constant use."

"May I have a look at that jacket, please? I have never seen one before," I took the bullet proof jacket in my hand and examined it closely.

"If it's God's will, then man can be brought out alive even from the wildest fire burning around him," Mrs. Bhagat said.

"Of course."

I liked Bhagatji's ready wit and his political experience. He addressed a press conference on this tour. Later, he invited the media to a dinner. During the dinner one of the correspondents was upset and he addressed Bhagatji and myself roughly. He shouted and said nasty things, as if he was determined to kick up a row with the whole world. Bhagatji slowed him down with a few polite words. He said: "In a democracy free speech is everyone's privilege, but one must differentiate between arguments and quarrelling". The correspondent was silenced somewhat and felt rather humbled.

A vacancy had arisen in the Rajya Sabha from J & K. The candidate for this vacancy was not yet announced, because a decision had not been arrived at. The State Congress (I) had sent its list to Delhi for approval of their nominee. The N.C.(K) had also sent its list of nominees to Delhi, justifying their claim to put their candidate in the Rajya Sabha. Both sides were pressing their points of view. The Congress (I) was throwing its weight around because of their greater strength of members in the State Assembly. Many leaders of the Congress (I) visited Delhi to get their candidate cleared for this vacancy. Ultimately however, when the name of the candidate was sent from Delhi, it did not figure in any of these two contending lists. Instead a well known businessman of the state had been nominated for the seat. Tirath Ram Amla who had been a member of the Rajya Sabha from the state, was nominated again. His choice caused gloom in the Congress (I) circles, while the N.C. (K) accepted the candidature of T. R. Amla with obvious glee. Although Amla Sahib belonged to Congress (I), many in the party had not been happy over his choice, while the Shah group considered this as their own victory because both the lists had been superseded by the Centre. At the time of voting, the Congress (I) members showed disinterest in the exercise, while Shah took keen interest to ensure Amla's election.

I think history is often created by trivial incidents. Here is one that had far reaching consequences for the State's polity. In the

vicinity of the new secretariat, there is an old temple in which a "Bhandara" (a religious feast) was allowed to be organized. It was said that the temple was an old one, but it had been declared closed ever since the Assembly hall building had been built at the site. In fact the temple had become a part of this building itself. It had been left alone with a huge lock on its doors. Indeed, people had forgotten about its existence. I don't know when, where and how this temple had been allowed to be opened again. As far as I recollect there was no discussion on this subject in the cabinet. Whatever may have been the reasons, it was evident to everyone that this feast was allowed in order to appease the Hindu community of Jammu. The feast was conducted with a lot of enthusiasm by the Shiv Sena of Jammu and some allied organisations. Except myself, everyone of my cabinet colleagues had gone to attend the feast. I too had been invited, but deep down in my conscience there was a revulsion and opposition to such a step.

Although the government was going on smoothly, there were occasions when the boat of the government would begin rocking again. One day, during the course of a cabinet meeting, the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary had some words over some issue. Mr. Shah was enraged as the Chief Secretary offered some clarifications. Shah lost his cool completely and uttered unprintable words. The Chief Secretary had kept a stony silence as his face turned deep crimson. Words seemed to have got stuck on his lips, probably he wanted to retaliate? But, he didn't or perhaps he couldn't. Even in the cold climate I saw sweat on his brow. Quietly, he stood up and left the Cabinet room. He did not return that day. I had expected that soon after we will receive the letter of resignation of the Chief Secretary.

However, I was very much astonished when on the very next day I met the Chief Secretary again in yet another Cabinet meeting. The way both of them behaved, with studied politeness, gave the impression that nothing untoward had transpired between them a day earlier.

Such incidents recurred again. Shah and D.D. Thakur exchanged unpleasant notes and words between them. And, Thakur even offered to resign from the ministry. The incidents were

reported by the media as lead stories in the local dailies with all the details reported as they had occurred.

I was deeply distressed by these happenings. It appeared to me that everyone of our colleagues were striving to drown the boat of this Ministry, and by being the first to achieve that goal, become a sort of a political hero. However, the resignation of Thakur Sahib was not accepted and he was persuaded to continue as a member of the government.

Shah returned from a short tour. On his return, I went to meet him at his residence.

He was looking through a pile of office files. Before my arrival, Ministers Ghulam Hassan Mir and Hakim Yasin were already present there. In the same room, on one side R. N. Kaul, advocate, was also sitting. Kaul Sahib was known to Shah Sahib as a professional colleague at the bar. After he finished with the files, he began talking about local issues. Among other things he talked about corruption:

"There are many rumours about corruption in government. People are indeed making wild charges against my own colleagues. Only I know how damaging these are. How long can I defend them against this onslaught?"

"These could even be mischievous allegations." I said.

"Why don't people allege anything against you? Perhaps people know well, who is doing what? Do you get me?" he replied.

"During Sheikh Sahib's regime people made allegations against Begum Sahiba. Do you mean to say that we should believe these as facts?"

Avoiding a direct reply to my question, as if he didn't hear me, he replied: "What people allege is never wrong. They don't make up any stories; no doubt they do tend to exaggerate events one way or the other", Shah said addressing his words to R. N. Kaul. He paused, and continued: "Am I right?" Kaul didn't say anything in reply.

For sometime I was away from Jammu. I went on an official visit to Delhi and Rajasthan. On my return I realized that the relations between the Congress (I) and the N.C.(Khalida) had

soured further. There was tremendous pressure on N.C.(K) for its merger with the Congress (I). Merger was, in fact, considered imminent. There was hot rumour which almost was a fact, that if there is no such merger, the Congress (I) will withdraw its support from the Shah government. Not only were members of the Congress strongly in favour of this decision, but most N.C. (Khalida) members were also of the view that this constant irritant ought now to be put aside by a merger decision. But this was easier said than done. The leaders of the Congress (I) wanted to have the cake and eat it too. They wanted to achieve the twin objectives of merger of N.C.(K) with their party, as well simultaneous replacement of Chief Minister Shah by their own nominee.

In connection with this matter, Janak Raj Gupta and Munshi Habibullah together called on me one day. Janak Raj began to sing the old tunes again. He said:

"Shah Sahib does not get along well with anybody. He is autocratic in behaviour. We want a clean administration. You have always lent your support to us which we expect this time as well."

"But, support for what? What is the agenda?" I asked rather peeved.

"To send him off packing. That's in the country's interest", Janak Raj was referring to G.M. Shah.

"I know quite well what's in the nation's interest. You'll ruin the country by such actions. This is merely a question of sharing power. And, I must say, you are being terribly impatient. If it's a question of merger, Shah would agree to it; after the elections." My response was given in an agitated and angry tone.

"Please give us your answer clearly", he said with earnestness.

"If you're hell bent on enacting this plot, this will be quite wrong. Its political fallout would be disastrous. You want to commit political 'harakiri'. I am not prepared to be party to such a course of action." I said conveying my sadness and displeasure. On the following day Yash Bhasin, Editor of *Panorama* magazine met me. He is brother of Ved Bhasin, Editor of the *Kashmir Times*, Jammu. The Bhasin brothers had an affinity for the Congress and, moreover, they were friends of the state leaders of the

State Congress (I). Naturally, Yash Bhasin also made a similar proposal to me. I had clearly told him that the proposed course of action would be detrimental to the state, besides damaging Congress (I) credibility with the people, who will never forget and forgive them for it. While the Congress (I) was preparing for such a showdown, G.M. Shah was also going about in a manner that rapidly turned his many friends into enemies.

I had gone to meet G.M. Shah and Khalida at their residence after their return from Delhi. Dilawar Mir was also present there. As they were talking, I gathered that Mufti Mohd. Sayeed had met them at the Jammu airport. Although Mufti was then the President of the Congress (I), Shah did not pay any attention or show courtesy to him at all. Khalida had, however, made amends by her politeness and courtesy. She had tried to bring her husband and Mufti closer, remove the misunderstanding between them, and build trust instead. But she did not succeed because of the grievous injury her husband's attitude had already done. Mufti Sayeed had felt quite upset by Shah's cold and intolerant behaviour. Mufti had said to Dilawar Mir and Ali Mohd. Naik, "We are supporting your government and you've the cheek to show us the door?"

Already, the so called co-ordination committee of the two parties had been in a shambles. Except Shah himself everyone amongst us was keen to avoid a rift or chasm which would be impossible to close. On the 26th of January, at the Republic Day Reception given by the Governor, I observed and felt that the bonhomie between the political leaders of the two parties was rather too effusive and evident. I saw many leaders warmly embracing each other so as to convey the message to the citizens and bureaucrats present that all was going on well. There could also have been a directive from the Centre to the Congress (I) leaders of the state not to rock the boat as yet.

G.M. Shah and Rajiv Gandhi had met not long ago and sorted out issues satisfactorily. The media highlighted the news about the unstinted support of the Congress to the Shah Government. These developments had dismayed the J & K Congress (I) and the leaders were quickly on the look out for other games (or shall I

call them conspiracies?) which they could hatch. They began their confabulations earnestly on this vital task.

No sooner had the temple in the Jammu secretariat been opened, than a spate of problems of unprecedented nature cropped up. The Muslim employees of the government made a demand for the construction of a mosque in the secretariat premises. Abdul Gani Lone (MLA), formerly a member of and Minister in the Congress (I) government, was providing the leadership and encouragement to the employees on this issue. Lone was an independent MLA and was generally propounding issues which came closer to the demands of the sectarian Muslim organisations in the state. Rather than being a matter of deeper conviction, the new strategy adopted by him was to garner votes as an independent and win the seat from his constituency in the border area closer to the line of actual control. On 3rd February 1986, a "Bandh" had been organized in Srinagar on account of the "Al-Aqsa" mosque. The bandh call had been given by Muslim groups and parties in the valley. The government had dealt with the problem tactfully and prevented any escalation of violent incidents or poor law and order.

In connection with these incidents a meeting was called by the Chief Minister which I attended alongwith other colleagues. D.D. Thakur, Ali Mohd. Naik, Dilawar Mir, and Mehboob Beg were already present there. During the discussion Shah Sahib observed at one point:

"The Muslim employees demand that a mosque be constructed for prayers in the secretariat". D.D. Thakur had replied:

"It would be absolutely improper to build a mosque in here. There would be demands for other religious places of worship too". This annoyed G.M. Shah and he said:

"Offering 'Namaz' is not a sin! Tomorrow, you'll tell me, don't offer your 'Namaz'! What kind of religion is this? Is that the justification for our acceding to India? I am a Muslim and offer my 'Namaz' five times. Who can prevent me from doing so?"

"You tell me?" he said pointing towards me. "What sin have I committed by allowing these people to offer prayers at the temple? Everybody has a fundamental right to practise his faith."

Shah's face flushed while he spoke.

"Opening the temple was a very wrong decision." As soon as I said this his anger exploded. It was like a wild fire.

"I am not a faithless person like you. Arun Nehru also speaks like this. I don't know what he thinks of himself". Most cabinet colleagues present there at this time, kept mostly quiet.

Thus a room in the secretariat was assigned to become the prayer room, where employees willing to do so, could offer their "Namaz".

Around this time two festivals, one of the Hindus and the other of the Muslims followed each other closely. The "faithful" wanted to take out processions in the streets of Jammu on the respective days. The government gave permission to both the groups to organize these festivities and take out processions. In the procession of the Hindus, youths belonging to Shiv Sena exhibited primitive arms openly in the streets. In the Muslim procession the slogans raised created an equally strong emotional stir. Both groups felt agitated and apprehensive, leading to the creation of an atmosphere of mistrust and anxiety. It was natural in such a situation that a few incidents of violent clashes between communal groups take place. A tailor's shop was set on fire, causing tension between the two communities.

What was even worse, rumours and ill founded statements, mischievous and deliberate half truths were spread by both sides in order to grip the people in their wake.

This was the opportunity for which the political parties were keenly plotting and they would not let it go unused for their own respective objectives. They added fuel to the fire in their own ways. At midnight the misguided youths of Jammu went up on the rooftops of their homes and began to beat brass plates and utensils with steel rods. There was a frightening noise all over the sleepy town. When I heard the noise, I was startled. People were frightened. The Kashmiri Muslims residing in Jammu, mostly employees and their families, believed that the youth would attack them at any moment. There was wild scare amongst them.

Orders imposing curfew were issued by the government immediately after the incident. Rumours and disinformation kept on

making the rounds. The employees of the secretariat went on a strike. Their contention was that they did not feel safe in Jammu. G.M. Bhadarwahi, a Minister in the Shah government, was deputed to talk to the employees and reassure them about security. He did not succeed in persuading them to call off their strike.

The next day I called on Khalida Begum where some other ministers were already with her. G.M. Shah had proceeded to Srinagar. From the conversation that transpired amongst Talib Hussain, Ali Mohd. Naik, Bhadarwahi and the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, I could fathom that all of them were feeling somewhat afraid and apprehensive and showed resentment against the people of Jammu who had indulged in these acts of harassment and communal hatred.

For people in Kashmir the news of these happenings was enough to trigger off a reaction. Bus drivers, taxi owners and others coming from Jammu towards Srinagar were spreading rumours very fast. It appeared to be the paid handiwork of interested political groups to spread false and emotionally charged information in this manner. Right from Qazigund as vehicles entered the valley, the rumours were couched in such language:

"In Jammu, Muslims are being massacred. A truck load of dead bodies is following behind me". The driver would say this much, and move on. The truck load of dead persons never arrived. But the mischief had been done beyond repair.

No sooner had such information spread in the interior of the villages, some misguided youth went on a rampage and destroyed idols in some local temples and set the homes of Kashmiri Hindus on fire. Some houses in the community were also looted of their belongings. Broken idols were thrown into the nearby streams. For spreading rumours and creating tension, various political outfits had spent enough resources amongst unruly elements to achieve their goals through such nefarious deeds. Rumours fanned the fires and instead of good sense prevailing tension between the two communities was acutely heightened.

The State Congress (I) circles were gloating over the tense communal and law and order situation in the state. They were very hopeful that very soon the state government will be taken

over by them. For this reason they did everything possible to let the situation worsen.

The Chief Minister returned to Jammu and chaired an emergency meeting of the Cabinet. It was resolved to reactivate the co-ordination committee of the Cong (I) and N.C.(K). The government also decided to compensate the aggrieved people for the losses suffered by them. The government would repair the damaged places of worship and provide building materials at subsidized prices to those whose homes were destroyed. These decisions, however, provided the very tools to the opponents for inciting one community against the other on a course of violent confrontation.

I paid a visit to Srinagar and then moved on to inspect those villages where acts of loot and arson had taken place. I met the local people, youths, elders, group leaders and the women of these villages. Although many temples and houses had been gutted by and large the people felt quite sad and ashamed about the incidents having taken place. Many Hindus admitted that their Muslim neighbours had saved them by risking their own lives while preventing the hooligans from perpetrating atrocities on them. When I went to meet a large segment of people at the Khannabal Dak Bungalow, a young man got up from the crowd and sought to meet me alone in privacy. He said: "I want to speak to you about an important matter". In the midst of the tumult made by the restive crowd, I went inside a room of the Dak Bungalow, where the Director General of Police Mr. Khajuria with other police officers and some political leaders were already sitting. Before talking to them, the youngman was very earnest to talk to me. Therefore, I decided to hear him first. In a very few words and with clarity he spoke some profound words: "No doubt, whatever has happened over here has been most unfortunate. We do agree with that. But the manner in which these incidents are being highlighted and presented to the outside world, has hurt us quite deeply."

"It's hurt you? How?" I asked.

"Every now and then a leader from Delhi comes here. He may belong to any political party. You've also been coming from

Jammu, one by one", he was saying.

"Such incidents are shameful. And it is our duty to see what had happened, how much damage is done and why?" I said with raised eyebrows.

"True! Then where was the government at Delhi, or the state government at that time when we suffered lot of damage, and worse. Where were the leaders then?"

"Which tragedy?" I asked startled.

"When in the wake of Bhutto's hanging the people had burnt our villages, looted us and tortured us. Nobody visited us then to shed tears over our plight. Those people who suffered, were they not Kashmiris?" There was lot of anger in his words.

More youth joined him soon after. And one of them said:

"Come on, Nazir Ahmed, forget these matters now," they took Nazir away and left the room.

Having witnessed the present tragedy, and with the words of the youth ringing fresh in my mind, I was quite disturbed.

From my inner depths rose a voice: Why this scenario? So much hate? What's the reason? How long shall this continue? I talked to myself, "Will our country never get rid of these communal orgies? Why is man hell bent to kill another? Aren't animals better than humans? They never kill one of their own species. We humans are demons in the garb of humans, and are ever keen in the vanguard for shedding our own blood."

While meeting various groups I was told by many of them: "It wasn't the hand of any one political group in these troubles. Many political parties were having their workers in the forefront of these clashes. Besides the Jamat-i-Islami which was always taking the lead in such turmoil, there were many so-called secular parties also in the fray this time. We have now lost faith in everyone."

The people in Anantnag were adamant for the transfer of the Deputy Commissioner and the Director General Police immediately.

At about the same time posters were pasted on the walls of temples and mosques in Srinagar which could incite communal clashes. The posters on the temple walls could be the handiwork of the Muslims and those on the mosques could be attributed to

mischievous Hindus. The real truth was hidden. Nevertheless, such things gave rise to anxiety and apprehensions. It was evident that there was a deep conspiracy. It is my personal opinion that even at this time, some external agencies were working to achieve their objective by creating turmoil in the state. But the misfortune is that the political leaders, due to their personal rivalries and dissensions, would not heed these warnings. They were engrossed in settling their personal scores. If sometimes they realized the dangers, they would ignore it in order to see their opponents vanquished.

When I came to know about these posters I called Jaswant Singh, the Senior Superintendent of Police, and Tika Lal Taploo, the President of Kashmir Bhartiya Janta Party, to my home. Jaswant Singh told me that all the posters had been removed from the walls. He also revealed that the contents of the posters were propagated by those very people by word of mouth. Tika Lal Taploo issued a categorical statement that no Hindu organisation had printed these obnoxious posters. Also, Muslim leaders condemned those posters which were ascribed to Muslim organisations.

The Hindu employees of the government went on mass casual leave in order to protest against the untoward events that had occurred. And the next day there was a total "bandh" observed in the city.

At the same time there were growing rumours about the immediate promulgation of Governor's rule in the state. It was evident that this could be announced any moment. It was now inevitable.

On 6th March, there was a large gathering of prominent citizens of Kashmir in Hotel Broadway. The meeting was attended by citizens and leaders of all the religious groups Hindu, Muslim and Sikh in the city of Srinagar. The objective of the meeting was to bring about amity and goodwill amongst people and meet the challenge of the growing communal virus. Vijay Dhar had made this meeting possible. He was formerly the Political Secretary to the Prime Minister and is the son of the Late D.P. Dhar (who had been the Minister for Planning in the Govt. of India). Vijay kept

his hotel at the disposal of the participants and made every effort to help achieve the objective of communal amity. Among those who participated were Dr. Jagat Mohini, a renowned physician and political leader of Srinagar, Mohd. Yussuf Jan, Block President of the National Conference, Late Mohiuddin Salati, Rashid Shah, S.K. Kaul of the Congress (I) and many others from the media and the bar. The participants were unanimous in condemning the attempts made by some to vitiate the atmosphere, and made a pointed reference to the need for preserving the secular and culturally rich polity of the state.

Chapter 21

Governor's Rule, 1986

ON 7th March, the Jammu and Kashmir Congress (I) withdrew its support from the Shah Ministry. Within minutes of this declaration Governor's rule was promulgated in the state. At this time I was in Srinagar.

Two days before Shah was finally ditched by the Congress (I), he had been called to New Delhi. There, the Prime Minister had asked for his resignation as the Chief Minister. At the same time the promise of politically rehabilitating him through a Governor's post or some other equivalent position was held out to him. It was also suggested that even Khalida Shah and their son would be suitably accommodated. These matters were personally divulged by Shah himself to all of us in his government. According to this agreed formula, Shah was to proceed straight from the airport to the Raj Bhavan and hand in his resignation. This was, however, not to be so. Instead, something else happened. History was making its own choices again.

As soon as Shah alighted from the plane at the Jammu airport, he was met by G.N. Kochak whom Khalida had sent specially to escort him straight to his house before resigning. While Shah was in Delhi, Khalida had papered over her differences with her mother, Begum Abdullah and her younger sister on phone. This fact was reported to me later by my party colleagues. It was even said that Khalida also spoke to Dr. Farooq on the political situation at this time. I do not know what had transpired in their conversations, but as soon as G.M. Shah was in his home he was made to speak to Dr. Farooq on the telephone. I do not know what transpired between Shah and Farooq, but what I heard from Shah and the other colleagues, is related here. The National Conference (Khalida) had conveyed to Farooq its desire to merge with the N.C. (Farooq). This proposal from Shah had been readily ac-

cepted by Farooq. G.M. Shah had obviously taken this decision at the behest of his wife and he was not sure how many of his colleagues would support this proposal. Talib Hussain, A.M. Naik, and Sheikh Jabbar had indeed vehemently and categorically rejected this move at the very outset. Dr. Mehboob Beg and I were in Srinagar. The other MLAs joined G.M. Shah and accompanied him to the Raj Bhavan. There they declared their support to Farooq Abdullah and Shah offered his resignation to the Governor.

On March 8, at about 11.30 a.m. I reached Jammu and went straight to meet the Chief Minister at his residence. Other colleagues were present there and everyone seemed to be in a cheerful mood. When I exchanged ideas with Beg, Talib Hussain and Naik, it was evident to me that they were not in favour of this course of events. Some MLAs of the Farooq group also came to the house. There was a lot of warm exchanges and embracing amongst the members. It looked as if they were meeting each other after ages and that some lost treasure had been found again. G.M. Shah and P.L. Handoo were respectively representing the two groups and meeting and welcoming everybody. G.M. Shah was obviously pleased and he showed it by the way he talked. He said:

“Do you see? We have paid them in their own coin. Now they will know how dear it costs them to play such games. We have slapped these ‘Delhi Wallas’ (the leadership at the centre is thus derisively referred to) squarely in the face.”

“We didn’t believe that these Congressmen could be so mean. They use people and throw them away unceremoniously”, P.L. Handoo said in support of Shah. When G.M. Shah and Handoo saw me they said in unison:

“Congratulations! Hearty greetings! Now we are together again.”

Sadly however, this joy and celebration was not to last long. On the same day, in the late evening, Dr. Farooq (who was in Srinagar at the time) made a statement totally denouncing the merger of the N.C.(F) and N.C.(K) which was not likely to get the reins of government into his own hands.

Although he had earlier accepted this proposal eagerly, it was a surprise that he sprung later. What could have been the motives or reasons behind this? One can only surmise about the possible reasons. There could be two. One was that he was directed from Delhi not to accept the reins of government at this juncture. This was, in fact, being talked about very much in the political and media circles. The other possibility is that Farooq was obviously taking a revenge on his sister and brother-in-law. There couldn't have been a better opportunity for him to do so.

Whatever the truth, as a consequence of these developments, there was no merger of the two groups at all. The N.C.(K) faced disaster because of the hasty and unilateral moves made by Khalida and G.M. Shah. They had not realized their political moorings adequately. Their proposal of merger was a suicidal act. Shah had said to his colleagues clearly, "You choose your own political posture. You are absolutely free. I shall not exercise any pressure whatsoever. We have worked together as friends and we must depart as friends." Although Shah appeared to be clear in his mind about the rest of us, yet there was something else being planned by Bandey, Kochak and Khalida. Now that Farooq had given them a strong kick, they were anxiously trying to weave the N.C.(K) back into a pattern. They had unwittingly destroyed the party structure. Now, with a lot of repentance, they were trying hard to join and cement the pieces together.

As I mentioned earlier, there were many in the N.C.(K) who wanted to merge their identity with the Congress (I). In consultation with the leaders of the Congress (I) these leaders of the N.C.(K) formed into a separate group under the leadership of Ali Mohd. Naik. There did not seem to be any other option because these leaders maintained a good liaison with the Congress (I) in the state. The Congress (I) leaders were making hectic efforts to form the state government with our full support assured in the Assembly, but no one knew for certain whether the Congress High Command had given their clearance for such a proposal.

There was a political vacuum in the state. Placing the state under Governor's rule for a long period was not considered desirable by the Delhi Government. The problem was, therefore, pos-

ing severe challenges to the Central Government. While the Governor of the state was keen to bring the state under President's rule under Article 356 of the Constitution of India, Farooq Abdullah was keen to hold fresh elections to the State Legislative Assembly. There was, however, the apprehension that the revival of the political process at that juncture might aggravate communal or parochial tension in the state. The situation of law and order in the neighbouring state of Punjab had also deteriorated and the Union Government was not prepared to let loose another Pandora's box in the state. At the same time there was talk of a secret accord between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Dr. Farooq whereby it was agreed to form a coalition government of the Congress (I) and the National Conference (Farooq). The two were committed to and had resolved to use this opportunity for dealing firmly with the rising communal forces in the state. Whatever might have been the perceptions of the Congress High Command on these matters, it was clearly known that the leaders of the state Congress (I) were not at all in favour of such a deal.

There was a stalemate. Every leader was, therefore, rushing to Delhi, expressing his views and trying to convince the High Command about their validity. Mufti Sayeed, Mangat Ram Sharma, Janak Raj Gupta, Iftikar Arsani and other Congress (I) leaders made a beeline to Delhi. The same was true of Governor Jagmohan and Farooq Abdullah. It appeared that the keys to their destiny were securely placed in a safe at Delhi. Even those who considered themselves the trusted loyalists of the court did not truly know the mind of the leader.

Governor's rule brought in a new dynamism into the state government apparatus. Development works were executed fast and construction of public works became visible everywhere. People thronged to meet the Governor and place their grievances before him. He issued executive instructions and directives without delay. Works that had not come about for years were done now. The Governor had understood clearly that the roots of Muslim fundamentalism were getting entrenched in the society. Therefore he did not consider it prudent to disturb the hornet's nest at all. Instead, he tried to appease these elements in order to

buy peace in the short run.

For the sake of rooting out corruption, he discharged many senior engineers from their services by summary orders. Most of these officers belonged only to one religious group. Thereby he sought to get, with one stroke of his pen, support for himself from the majority community and win popularity amongst the people.

At this juncture Maulvi Qazi Nissar shot into prominence in district Anantnag. His political stance gripped the minds of many people throughout the valley. He would jump into the fray and make public appearances with fiery speeches thrown in. At this time there was a mass protest in Kashmir, against U.S.A. because of U.S. intervention against Libya—a Muslim country. Also, the cricket match at Sharjah and Pakistan's victory over India created an emotional mobilization of the people. Many people came out in the streets, celebrating the victory of Pakistan with fireworks and slogans.

Soon thereafter Mufti Mohd. Sayeed was appointed as a Cabinet Minister in the Union Government with the portfolio of tourism. Later when he paid an official visit to Srinagar he received a warm welcome. I visited him at his home and found an unbroken chain of people meeting and felicitating him for taking up the assignment at the Centre.

Arun Nehru came on an official visit to Kashmir but unfortunately, he had a heart attack soon after his arrival in Srinagar. There was also a widespread rumour in Srinagar about the strained relations of Nehru with the Prime Minister. The people gossiped about Rajiv's not visiting Srinagar to look up Arun Nehru in the hospital.

Khalida also suffered from a heart ailment and I, along with Talib Hussain, Nayak and Dilawar Mir and other colleagues, went to look her up. There was no occasion to talk on politics and we confined our conversation to Khalida's health and well being.

On 25th July 1986, fourteen passengers travelling in a bus through Punjab were ruthlessly shot dead by militants. The news shook the whole country by its unheard of ghastly character. Soon after on August 10th, General Vaidya was assassinated near his

residence in Pune by another group of militant youth. There was a grave situation developing and the nation was gripped by worst forebodings about the future.

Distressed by events that were taking place around here, I wrote a letter to Rajiv Gandhi.

The summer of 1986 was spent in a sort of political tug of war by the many participants. The fate of the state was not clear. Who will take over the state government and when? Who will be the leader to take the lead? Will Governor's rule continue? These and many similar questions were in everyone's mind. A number of Ministers of the Union Government and Congress (I) leaders visited Srinagar. Among those were Najma Heptullah, Rajesh Pilot, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kapil Mohan Dev and Dalbir Singh and others. Many local leaders of various political hues met them and explained their respective points of view.

Many political parties were determined to end the Governor's rule. So they contrived every possible mischief designed to destabilize the government, and create problems of law and order. Such activities had now become a routine pastime. In Srinagar, the admission of students into the professional colleges was made an excuse for an agitation by the students of the Women's college. Those who were responsible for these problems were known to the people. Simultaneously, there were repercussions of these episodes in Doda and Kishtwar where people came out on the streets and rioted. For Governor Jagmohan problems and headaches were created all over. It was well known that the National Conference was behind all these agitations.

Mufti Mohd. Sayeed was invited as a Chief Guest on the occasion of the "Save the Tree". The seminar was held at Hotel Centaur on the banks of the Dal Lake. Dr. Farooq was also invited to the seminar and was asked to speak. In his extempore speech, Farooq was all praise for the polity of India with its secular democratic constitution. He had also assured Mufti Mohd. Sayeed, Union Minister of Tourism at that time, that he "would always remain in the forefront for carrying his state and the country towards progress and development". He also said that "he

was prepared to shake hands and collaborate with all those who were determined to see India prosper and progress."

His speech did not please those elements whose presence within the National Conference had deeply influenced its character over the last three years. People were wondering if these were the words of the same person who had publicly resolved to wreak vengeance on the Congress (I) and fight them till the very end of his life. The people had not as yet forgotten his venomous rhetoric against the Union Government, and the Central leadership. Many people were still quoting his speeches for spreading anti-India sentiments amongst the masses.

Chapter 22

Rajiv-Farooq Accord

ON 7th November 1986, Farooq Abdullah was sworn in as the Chief Minister of the state once again. He formed a coalition government with the support of the Congress (I) Legislature party. On the same day the Legislative Assembly of the state was dissolved and Farooq became the head of a Caretaker Government of the state. A month later the Prime Minister paid a visit to Kashmir. A public congregation was held in the Iqbal Park and both Farooq and Rajiv addressed the crowd. Congress (I) and National Conference had jointly organized the show. The leaders talked about progress, development and prosperity and made promises of good times to come to the people. Rajiv and Farooq joined hands raising them high, skywards and proclaimed the abiding unity of their two parties. They resolved on oath that nobody on earth could now break this unity.

The exuberance of this occasion had a negative effect on the people. The fundamentalist and Muslim outfits made use of this Rajiv-Farooq accord as a weapon in their vitriolic campaign against the secular forces. The Awami Action Committee of Maulana Farooq, still an ally of the National Conference, was very much in the forefront of this campaign.

Soon after he took over the government, Dr. Farooq quickly got rid of those officers who were close to the Governor or who had been trusted by G.M. Shah during his tenure. Side by side he began a campaign of harassment against those MLAs who had given support to G.M. Shah and joined the N.C. (Khalida). He treated Rafiq Hussain Khan, Jagjivan Lal and Munshi Habibullah very harshly. In my case he wreaked vengeance by removing my husband from the post of Principal of the Regional Engineering College by retiring him prematurely seven years before

the due date. A few days later I called on G.M. Shah and Khalida Kochak, A.R. Wani and Mr. Rashid were also present there along with some others. On seeing me Shah Sahib said:

"You have had to take a heavy brunt. I didn't expect him to stoop so low."

"He will take revenge on all of us. This is only the beginning", added Kochak.

"Is it proper to snatch away someone's livelihood in this manner? He will surely have to pay for this unkind act", said Khalidaji.

"Why don't you file a writ petition in the Supreme Court against Farooq's action?" asked G.M. Shah.

"He will realize the folly of his actions", said Rashid.

"Yes, of course, we shall have to go to court", I told them.

After the accord between Rajiv and Farooq was pronounced, the Chairman of the Awami Action Committee, Maulana Farooq, wanted to get off from the shoulders of the National Conference. In the process he wanted to carry with him a sizable chunk of N.C. workers, who had been, over the years, dyed sufficiently in his political hues, so much so that they were openly critical of Farooq Abdullah's policies.

Chapter 23

The MUF Wave

THE Assembly elections for the State Legislature were announced in the spring of 1987. All the political parties including a large number of mushroom growth of political groups were suddenly activized. On one side there was the partnership and coalition of the N.C. and Congress (I), and on the other, there was a combination of the parties like Jamat-i-Islami, Qazi Nissar's Muslim group, Peoples League of A.G. Lone and the Awami Action Committee with other smaller groups were primarily united by the Islamic fundamentalists. These groups wanted to win the elections as a united group and therefore, they began electioneering with a joint mainfesto and common election symbol. This new group was called the Muslim United Front (MUF). The approach of the MUF and its mainfesto attracted a lot of adherents and fellow travellers amongst the Muslim leaders and intellectuals in the valley. The MUF ideology was discussed in every home and the party stalwarts made it known that the victory of the Front in the forthcoming Assembly elections would be a victory for the faith of Islam.

Every nook and corner of the streets was flooded with the exhibition of green flags of the Front. Seeing the crescent moon and the star sign of the Islamic faith on the green flag of the MUF would make people dance with joy on the streets. The people were told that with the victory of the MUF the entire face of the state would be changed. There will be prosperity and abundance of everything including industries, jobs and work for all. The other promises which made people fall instantly for the MUF, related to the eradication of corruption, profiteering, hoarding, and black marketing root and branch. Those found guilty of such nefarious acts would be dealt with severely. People sincerely

believed that this would happen because under Nizam-e-Mustafa (in Islamic countries) such guilty people may lose their limbs as punishment. People were indeed sick of these evils in the society.

On March 4th, 1987, when I was returning from the airport towards the city of Srinagar, I got into a traffic jam caused by a procession of MUF. It was a massive affair with trucks, taxis and people participating in large numbers. From atop the trucks youths were shouting slogans in praise of Islam and attracting the bystanders towards their cause. My car became part of the slow moving stream of people and inched along. I experienced the profuse welcome that people offered to the MUF procession by showering flowers, cheers and "shirin" (white sugar candy) over them. They responded to the slogans of the MUF workers by shouting the slogan of "Islam Zindabad" showing agreement with their cause. It was difficult for me to move out of the congested streets into a byelane, so I had been witness to the procession for a few hours.

There was no doubt, that although MUF might not win a majority of seats in the Assembly, it would make its presence felt as an effective and powerful opposition. There was a wave of sympathy with the MUF among the people. There was only one voice on the lips of the people, that in a democracy we would bring forth the party of our choice into power; a party that will genuinely meet the aspirations of the people and pay heed to their grievances.

My meetings with N.C. and Congress (I) leaders and workers revealed that Farooq Abdullah was in a quandary because of these significant political developments. These were, in a large measure, of his own creation because of his association and accord with the Awami Action Committee over the previous years. However, the National Conference workers were openly propagating the view and boasting that they would win the elections anyhow, whether people voted for them or not.

And indeed, the election results were predominantly favouring the candidates of N.C. and the Congress. Only four candidates of the Muslim United Front (MUF) were declared successful in the elections. People were by and large gravely disappointed by the

outcome of the elections. "Such monstrous rigging! And that too done so brazenly?" These were the questions on everybody's lips. The fraud played in the elections became a subject of conversation in every home. A few days after the results of the election were declared, I had visited a garage for repair of my car. I knew the proprietor personally and he was a staunch supporter of the National Conference. I talked to him about the political situation during the course of our informal chat. "You must have given your vote for the plough (symbol of the N.C.)?", I asked.

"You know that I have eleven (11) votes in my household. Ten were given to the MUF. My own solitary vote, over which alone I had control, undoubtedly went in favour of the N.C.", he told me.

"Rahman Sahib, in your home not a single vote would go to any other party. Why this change in this election? I am really surprised!" "This time there was a wave in favour of the MUF. Everyone got swayed by this flood. And this time even the National Conference has been sunk by him", he said referring to Farooq Abdullah. Abdul Rahman came nearer to me, and in a low voice added: "The vote rigging this time has been unprecedented. This is very bad. It will have very unpleasant repercussions." "Vote rigging is not a new phenomenon here?", said a person standing nearby. "Baba-i-Qaum (Sheikh Abdullah) had got us the right to vote. Now he (Farooq) has snatched this right from us. Because of Farooq's deeds, people are cursing even Sheikh Sahib and his ancestors", this bystander added.

"Sheikh Sahib was a towering leader, a visionary and a far-sighted man. Saying anything against him is like spitting at the sun. Those who do so will spit at their own faces", I told them with sadness in my voice.

"That's precisely what I'm saying. But, these new leaders, they are trying to paint all his deeds in the blackest hues. What a world of difference we find between how he (Sheikh Sahib) treated people and how these. . . . (unprintable). . . do".

One of these days I met Farooq Nazki, a senior Executive in the All India Radio. He was the Director of A.I.R. at that time and I knew him well personally for a long time. He was a well-wisher

of Dr. Farooq as well as favourably disposed towards him. He enquired about my welfare and said:

"So, how are you spending your time these days? Earlier you didn't have any time to spare?" There was obvious sarcasm in his voice. "It isn't difficult for me to use my time. There is indeed lot to do", I replied.

"Personally I feel sad about the future of only two persons. There is no hope for them hereafter. And, this is not only my view, but Dr. Farooq also thinks so," Farooq Nazki said emphasizing his words.

"May I know who are those two persons?" I asked, although I knew who he was talking about.

"One person is Khem Lata Wakhlu, and another is Dr. Mehboob Beg", Nazki said pointing towards me.

"How long have you been thinking along those lines?", I asked Nazki.

"Ever since Dr. Farooq won the elections! You have lost the game", Nazki said haughtily.

"Who has lost and who has won, this is as yet so difficult to predict. The election results have just come, and the future is yet to unfold", I replied.

"A victory is a victory indeed, no matter, how it comes about", Nazki said in passing.

Although MUF lost the elections, they received a lot of public sympathy for their cause. Everywhere people were discussing about rigging in the elections. People surmized that Rajiv Gandhi and Dr. Farooq have deliberately taken away their right to vote and betrayed them by such massive rigging. They have not only choked democracy but also buried it for ever. MUF came in for favourable mention in every home, in every office and in every lane.

People began to perceive bad administration, rigging in the elections, and many other problems as a consequence of accession to India. They thought that if they had been independent, or part of an Islamic country, then perhaps they would not face such problems. "Under the Islamic law there is no theft, no corruption,

no moneylender and no blackmarketing. Everybody has enough to eat and enough to wear. Nobody is without a job." With this kind of propaganda, the MUF would put another bait in the field to attract people.

For the why and how of accession to India, MUF would lay all the blame on Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah and the National Conference. Kashmir has a fertile soil for rumours. Flights of imagination come quite naturally to the people. I well remember the day when a hot rumour floated in the city of Srinagar.

People talked about how Dr. Farooq abused his father in a public speech as the culprit responsible for accession of the state to India in 1947. It was further rumoured that Farooq had told the people to burn the grave of Sheikh Sahib in order to vindicate their grievances. I don't know if there was any truth in these rumours, but it is a fact that these rumours were spread by those political forces who wanted to usurp the leadership of Kashmir by any means.

Around this time I heard that Mekhla Jha was fatally ill and on 24th of May 1987, Mr. L.K. Jha had a heart attack. I remembered wonderful days spent with the Jhas. It was very upsetting for me.

In the same month Kashmir had torrential rains. The water of Dal Lake overflowed into vast areas of land, flooding all the hotels and guest houses situated on its bank. The tourists had a tough time and they were evacuated by boats which were plying over the main Boulevard Road on one side of the lake. At this time, Farooq Abdullah, accompanied by government officials, went over the city in a helicopter, to take stock of the flood situation. When he was hovering overhead, people came out of their homes, some youngmen stood on the flooded road and shouted towards him:

"We are dying here and you are having a joy ride", one said.

"He was only craving for helicopters", another added.

"Don't worry, yar! You're going to get good compensation. That's why he is assessing the whole area."

"You think, you'll get compensation? Don't live in a fool's paradise."

"Wouldn't money go into their pockets? What would you

get?", added another. His tone was bitter.

"Why are you shouting like this? They are doing their work and you are wasting your time." An old man was chasing these young men away.

Also, at the same time there were communal clashes in the city of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh. Kashmir did not lag behind in reacting. Some processions were taken out in protest against the riots in Meerut. Black flags were hoisted on buses, cars, and other vehicles. There were other minor incidents of skirmishes with the police, but these were soon brought under control.

On 15th July, Mufti Sayeed resigned from the Union Cabinet. He said he had resigned in protest against the riots in Meerut. However, Mufti was neither happy nor in favour of the Prime Minister's Kashmir policy. When the talks which resulted in the accord between Rajiv and Farooq were going on, Mufti Sayeed was completely ignored. He was sore that he was not taken into confidence, although he was the President of the J & K P.C.C.(I) at that time. He had had to swallow the bitter pill and quietly accept a place in the Union Cabinet, which he had now resigned.

Mufti's resignation gave rise to a mixed response in Kashmir. In Anantnag district, which he visited soon after his resignation, he was given a rousing welcome. The people expected that Mufti would spew venom against India, as had been the prevailing practice of leaders out of power. But he did not do anything of that sort. He did not speak against India, although he criticized the system which did not curb communal violence. The people were rather disappointed.

Two days later V.P. Singh too resigned from the Union Cabinet. There was quite a flutter in the political circles all over the country. The strong pillars of Rajiv's government were coming asunder, and it was obvious that there was grave turmoil within the Congress (I) party.

Around this time, it also happened that there was an attack on the holy city of Mecca by Irani terrorists. They killed a large number of pilgrims performing their "haj" at this time, and caused a lot of misery to thousands of others. It is amazing that this incident did not cause any political reaction or provoke anybody

in Kashmir. The incident took place so suddenly that all the leaders of MUF were caught unawares and did not really know how to react at this juncture. To the common man, however, the incident was obviously a sad happening at a sacred place and viewed as inauspicious by the faithful.

One day I went to see Mufti Sayeed who was in a relaxed and happy mood. Talib Hussain was also with him. Mufti informed us that all those who had resigned from the Congress (I) were going to launch a new party. These included V.P. Singh, Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammed Khan, Mufti Sayeed and others. The new party's aim and objects would be based on the correct Congress ideology and these leaders were of the opinion that there was no hope for the growth of the Congress (I) under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi. A fully grown two-party system was needed for the health of democracy in the country. Right thinking people were stressing this need because that alone would prove beneficial to the country's polity, for its growth, and for revamping the democratic system as a whole.

We agreed with Mufti's views and assured him that these would be carried and disseminated amongst the people. The seeds of the "Jan Morcha" were sown in this manner which grew into a nice tree later.

A meeting of the Social Welfare Advisory Board was held at the Raj Bhavan in Srinagar on 10th September 1987. This time I was visiting the Raj Bhavan after a gap of about eighteen months. As soon as I reached the place, I went straight ahead looking and searching for a magnificent building where we had attended so many meetings before. But to my utter amazement the building did not exist any longer. My heart sank with panic, as I wondered where on earth this beautiful building had gone? A number of get-togethers, meetings, and functions were held in that beautiful structure. Today not a trace of that palace was visible, the whole area having been cleaned up in such a way that no one could believe a building ever existed on that spot before! This building had been a monument of Kashmiri handiwork and craftsmanship, having been built at a cost of several lakhs. It was like a glazed

palace overlooking the lake. I learnt that Governor Jagmohan had ordered the building to be dismantled as it was an environmental eyesore.

The meeting of the Board got started soon after the members met informally. I met Begum Abdullah and exchanged some pleasantries, but I felt there was no personal warmth present any more. Our exchanges appeared to be mere formalities. I also noticed that Begum Sahiba had now developed forgetfulness, so she had to be repeatedly briefed about the items on the agenda. As the various projects were discussed, I felt that the Members of the Board were hostile, and critical of the project with which I was associated. So they did not leave any stone unturned in cross examining me about the progress of the scheme. The verbal attacks were meant to humiliate me, and I knew all this was politically motivated. Members were trying to please Begum Sahiba. When the meeting was over two vociferous members namely Kunti Sawhney and Aisha Amin were bursting with joy over their forceful attacks on me.

During lunch my attention was caught by the conversation of Aisha Amin and Mrs. Alvi. Aisha was saying "Congratulations, about that thing".

"Has it been done?", Mrs. Alvi was asking Aisha.

"They have even been married", Aisha Amin said.

"Married? When?"

"Day before yesterday."

This conversation was made loudly enough for me to hear. A Hindu engineer's daughter had been married to a Muslim youth, also an engineer. I know the Hindu engineer very well, so I knew the background of their conversation which, in fact, was a topic of discussion in the town those days.

"I think this episode is rather stale now. We should encourage these kind of marriages. One should feel happy about it. How long are we going to suffer from this dichotomy? The boy is educated and smart and he is a good match for the girl", I joined in their conversation deliberately. Both of them stared at me in such a way as if saying:

"What do you mean by saying this? Why does she say so and

what can be the reason behind this?" Outwardly, however, they maintained a meaningful silence but I kept the conversation going.

"When are we going to be without communal riots and tension, without hatred and jealousy? When will these be replaced by love? Such marriages should get encouragement from people like us."

I could see a frown on their faces conveying that they were upset with my point of view. They changed the topic of conversation forthwith, and I also did not press the matter any further.

After the formation of the Jan Morcha, Mufti Sayeed called a meeting of all the workers and office bearers of this new party of the state in Srinagar. Most people who attended the meeting were formerly workers of the Congress (I) who had now joined the new party. I, alongwith Talib Hussain and Dr. Mehboob Beg, also joined the party. People were quite happy about the courageous steps taken by V.P. Singh and his colleagues. In Kashmir these new developments were welcomed too because the people perceived that in comparison with the Congress (I), the new party would show more energy, vigour, imagination and provide a new hopeful vision. Also, it would better deliver the goods and lay the foundations for value based politics. People were full of hopes. They wanted change and a chance to breathe some fresh air.

In Kashmir people had grown allergic to the policies of Congress (I). As the Jan Morcha had a secular base, and good leadership of upright people like V.P. Singh, the image of the party had made a better impression on the people here.

Around this time, the headlines in the local dailies said that G.L. Dogra, M.P. is going to be inducted into Farooq's cabinet as a nominee of the Congress (I). Dogra went to the Raj Bhavan, along with his friends and supporters, for the oath taking ceremony. However, there was no trace of the Chief Minister there. The people waited for quite some time at the Raj Bhavan before they were informed that the C.M. had gone on tour of a far flung area. The oath taking ceremony had to be cancelled and everyone present was upset at the irresponsible behaviour of the Chief Minister. This kind of practical joke was too much for a senior

leader like G. L. Dogra, and also for the Governor, who had to wait long in such an embarrassing situation. Later, when he was asked by the press, Dr. Farooq pretended to be quite innocent "Which oath taking ceremony?, who was to take the oath? I don't know anything about it", he had said.

On 7th October, a Government press release proclaimed that there would be no "Darbar Move" this winter. The Jammu and Kashmir state had two capitals at Srinagar and Jammu. All government offices functioned in Jammu during the winter months (November to April), and in Srinagar in summer (May to October). The declaration about cancelling this arrangement was made by the C.M. without consulting anyone. This was not the first occasion when Dr. Farooq had taken a decision like this which would have grave repercussions later. Ultimately, it is the people who suffered most in the bargain.

It was said that at the time of Rajiv-Farooq accord, Rajiv Gandhi had made a passing remark to the effect that there was no reason to shift the entire government to Jammu during the winter months because this causes a high and avoidable expenditure to the government. It was believed that these observations by the Prime Minister led to Farooq's hasty decision.

There were many reasons behind the long standing practice of "Darbar Move". The three regions of the State have peculiar characteristics of their own and are in many ways poles apart from each other. Each region has its own distinct history, way of life and culture. In Kashmir, Muslims constitute a majority of the population, and in Jammu it is the Hindus and Sikhs who form a majority while Buddhists predominate in Ladakh. Kashmir has severe winters while Jammu has very hot tropical summers. In order to render full justice to all the regions, the Maharaja of Kashmir had started this practice which was later continued even after the independence and formation of the democratic government. Former Chief Ministers like Sheikh Abdullah (1947-53 & 1975-82), Bakshi Ghulam Mohd. (1953-64), G.M. Sadiq (1964-71) and Mir Qasim (1971-75) did not discontinue this prevailing practice. They believed that it created a strong bondage and good interaction between the various regions.

Upon hearing the CM's decision the people of Jammu were upset and agitated. The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) in Jammu was waiting for an opportunity like this to exploit. They gave a call for total "bandh" in Jammu city, which grew into full scale noisy agitation against the order. The people of Jammu gave full support to the agitation; the lawyers and intellectuals joined the issue and insisted that the government order be withdrawn immediately. The Congress (I) also wanted to capture centre-stage and join the issue on this account because they were worried about their credibility but they did not want to break the brittle accord. They did not want to displease their mentors at Delhi.

The mounting pressure of the agitation which had escalated, made Dr. Farooq nervous. He had discussions with Central Ministers. The Union Home Minister, Buta Singh proposed a way out whereby some Departments would be located in Jammu and others located in Srinagar permanently. But this proposal had come too late. Ultimately there was no alternative left for the Chief Minister but to rescind the order and swallow the bitter pill.

The people of Jammu calmed down, but a problem now erupted in Kashmir. People in the valley were agitated over the withdrawal of the order. The workers and sympathisers of MUF came out openly against the Farooq government. Their contention was clever and simplistic:

"Firstly, why did he take such a step without giving it proper thought? And, now why did he bow before the people of Jammu in such a hasty manner?" The people perceived this as their humiliation and therefore agitated against the government. They insisted that all Government departments be permanently retained in Srinagar.

When Dr. Farooq became the Chief Minister the first time, people pardoned him gracefully for actions which they thought did not behove a Chief Minister. They sincerely believed that with experience he would show more maturity and political skill in his actions. When he was sworn in for the second time, people had no doubt in their minds that he was wiser and would be able to govern the state better. However, the people were disappointed because within moments of his assuming office, he took actions

which alienated him from them. In fact, they became indifferent towards him. The MUF and other like-minded parties were ever so eager to exaggerate the shortcomings of his government and administration.

During this year there was a great hue and cry amongst the people over admissions to Medical Colleges. The newspapers splashed the allegations to the effect that there was rampant corruption by government officials and other authorities concerned with the selections. It was alleged that lakhs of rupees were mopped up in bribes from the candidates, and the government was severely criticised. There was mud slinging against the Chief Minister and his misdeeds were being enumerated openly with the result that his reputation took a nosedive.

On 27th December, I chanced to meet G.M. Bhawan, General Secretary of the Janata Dal, in the bazar. I knew him well for a long time as a member of the National Conference. Later, he had become the President of the Srinagar Municipal Council. Mr. Bhawan had eventually joined the Congress (I) after having sharp differences with the leadership of the National Conference, and had risen to become District President of Srinagar Congress (I) for many years.

"Do you know Mr. G.L. Dogra is dead?" Bhawan asked me.

"What! G.L. Dogra!?", I enquired.

"Yes, yes, Dogra Sahib. He had a heart attack. He could not tolerate the humiliation he had at the oath-taking ceremony." Bhawan's face was full of grief.

About the same time, another stalwart and veteran of the state's freedom movement, Sofi Mohd. Akbar, Chairman of the "Mahaz-i-Raishumari" passed away. He had been a close colleague of Sheikh Abdullah upto 1975, when they parted ways after Sheikh Sahib dissolved the Plebiscite Front. Sofi Akbar continued to hold his own views. There was a mixed kind of response over his demise. Some shops remained closed as a mark of respect to him. Dr. Farooq's efforts to declare official mourning on the occasion did not catch on.

At the start of the year 1988, L.K. Jha, former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, passed away. Another stalwart of a beauti-

ful era was no more. These men carved a permanent place for themselves in the history of the nation.

During the winter of 1988 I visited places in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. From my interaction with people at different levels, I got the impression that the people were unhappy with the Congress (I). At the same time they were not inclined to support other parties which were not equipped to give a better alternative to the ruling party and pull the people out of the quagmire. Although, the print media had given good co-operation and coverage to V.P. Singh and boosted his morale, the people had not as yet got a clear picture about his party's role. They were apprehensive and wondered whether he would be able to lead the country.

In Delhi parleys were going on between V.P. Singh, Arun Nehru, Arif Mohd. Khan, Mufti Sayeed and Satpal Malik to find ways of converting the Jan Morcha into a national level party as an alternative to Congress (I). I met Arun Nehru and Mufti Sayeed and apprised them about my observations and reactions of the people to the new party. Later I conveyed my views to the party leaders V.P. Singh, Arun Nehru, Mufti Sayeed and R.K. Hegde in writing from Srinagar. In the letter, I had stressed the need for dissolving all former party labels and creating a new national alternative opposition party whereby a truly two-party democratic system could be ushered in the country.

In Jammu and Kashmir we strived our utmost to put forth to the people our point of view. We met groups of people and well known citizens with views similar to ours. People appreciated the fact that someone has courageously stood up against the Congress (I) policies and practices. I toured a few villages with Abdul Qayyum, President of Jan Morcha in J & K, and found lot of people coming forth to join the common cause with vigour and enthusiasm.

The joint front of the opposition parties gave a call for an all party "bandh" in the country. However, the "bandh" call did not have any effect in Kashmir. At the national level these efforts were being made in order to build up a united National Front in opposition to the ruling Congress (I).

Chapter 24

Militancy

THE spring of 1988 was to be the harbinger of great changes in the body politic of Kashmir. Mistrust had been growing between Maulana Farooq, President of Awami Action Committee and the Chief Minister. The nearly five-year long honeymoon of "Double-Farooq" seemed to be almost over. Something had been brewing for a while and cracks in their accord were imminent. But all these fissures did not become evident to the public until written exchanges were published in the media. With a bang the accord had cracked and the house of cards had fallen.

In the month of January 1988, Maulana Farooq's open letter to the Chief Minister was published in the local papers. The Maulana blamed the Chief Minister for many issues like the Darbar Move fiasco, infringement of article 370 of the Constitution, and inefficiency of the coalition government of Congress (I) and the National Conference. Maulana Farooq also alleged that with the kind of governmental mismanagement that prevailed, the people comprising the Muslim majority of the state suffered badly. Dr. Farooq rebutted the charges and allegations appropriately and his reply was also published in the papers. But the people were not inclined to buy his version of the story.

Finally, on 11th January 1988, Maulana Farooq freed himself from the clutches of Farooq Abdullah and declared an end to the accord, which had been arrived at between the two at the time of Lok Sabha elections in 1983 with much fanfare at that time. Somehow they had managed to carry on with this unnatural alliance until their letters appeared in press. With this one stroke, Maulana Farooq wanted to appear as a saviour and benefactor of the Muslims. Also, he knew that the Chief Minister's reputation was going down, and he saw no advantage in holding on to Dr.

Farooq's apron-strings any longer.

The psychology of the people of Kashmir is somewhat strange. When there are any untoward happenings or mishaps in the country, like the Bhopal gas tragedy, killings in Punjab or Assam or other similar incidents, there is no political reaction in the valley. As against this, if anywhere in an Islamic country there is a major event, there is an immediate response of a magnitude beyond one's expectations or none at all depending upon how the response is politically manipulated. Maybe there is a geographical reason behind this attitude. For ages, the valley, surrounded by high mountains, remained cut off from the outside world. Due to their isolation the people developed their own unique way of thinking. After independence and partition of the country, the people retained an emotional tilt towards nations based on Islamic laws because Muslims formed a majority in the state.

Secondly, the electronic and other media have also played a great role in shaping these attitudes. The imagination of the people can now grasp global events in a jiffy. So whenever there is any problem in any Islamic country the reaction is spontaneous. What happens to the Palestinians? When did the U.N. Secretary-General visit Kabul or when has he gone to Pakistan?

There was a massive explosion in an ammunition dump near Rawalpindi in Pakistan. As the news was heard, some parties gave a call for a "bandh" in Kashmir, to express sympathy with the people of Pakistan. Although the "bandh" was somehow enforced in the bazars of Srinagar, yet the people, by and large, were not keen to close their shops. It was the hoodlums roaming on the streets who threatened the shopkeepers. Some shops were looted and their goods scattered on the streets. The hoodlums burnt some cars and buses in Lal Chowk, forcing people to flee. Due to such strong-arm tactics, the "bandh" was enforced for three days. The most affected areas were the downtown parts of Srinagar where Maulana Farooq's Awami Action Committee and Jamat-i-Islami held sway. There were clashes between the police and youth. The police had to use force to disperse the mobs and one person was killed and many others injured. These tragic events provided the needed impetus to unite the opposition parties

who created a big row against police atrocities.

1988 was a peculiar year right from the start. It began with a severe winter. For four days there was no power, and on the other three days the voltage was so low that we had to search for electric bulbs in candle light. Firewood and L.P. cooking gas were difficult to get and prices had risen. People were desperate and frustrated, because not only were power and fuel in short supply, but other essential commodities had also disappeared from the markets.

All Kashmiris are very fond of meat and fish. The severe winters of the valley explain this need for animal protein in Kashmir. Also, there is also an acute scarcity of vegetables. At one time the people used to dry some vegetables in the summer for subsequent use in winter. The practice is, however, not very common now because fresh vegetables imported from outside the valley are available throughout the year.

This year the "kothdars" (owners of the meat cartels in Srinagar) suddenly raised the price of mutton. There was a wave of protest by the people as a result of which the government intervened and began negotiations with the "kothdars". While these talks progressed, all the butchers' shops in the valley were closed. People did not want to buy mutton at a higher price. So it was resolved, by word of mouth, to boycott the purchase of mutton. The people wanted to teach the "kothdars" a lesson in their own way. And indeed, the people stood by their resolve, and for more than two months refrained from buying or consuming any mutton at all. They used their might and wanted the government to bring the price down by their intervention. However, instead of prices coming down, they found these were going up for all essential commodities.

Rashid, a senior officer in the government, came to our house one day. I asked him about the scarcity of essential goods. "Well, Rashid Sahib, how long are we to go on without mutton now? What is the outcome of the negotiations?" No sooner did I utter these words, than he got perturbed and angry.

"The CM won't allow any government employee to work

properly. Negotiations were going on smoothly, but he poked his nose and spoilt everything."

"Haven't they been able to fix the price?", I asked.

"Price? The 'kothdars' had agreed to a lower ceiling price but he popped into the meeting suddenly and announced a much higher price. He embarrassed us and sidelined the negotiations. The government's prestige was in shambles."

"Why?"

"I don't know." I heard the same story from the other people as well. Also, it was openly said by many responsible people that lot of money had exchanged hands in order to allow "kothdars" a higher price ceiling.

The accord between the National Conference and the Congress (I) was rather superficial. At best it was confined to Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah. The grassroot workers from either side were ever ready to show each other down. They were outwardly showing unity and togetherness. In their hearts, they were bent upon cutting at each other's roots as well as washing their dirty linen in public. Mistrust between these two parties was not only detrimental to them but to all those forces which were in favour of secularism, communal harmony and brotherhood.

The ministers of this government belonging to both parties were aware that the days of the government are numbered. So they amassed as much wealth as they could. Two ministers of the government, Sheikh Maqbool and P.L. Handoo, had to face a barrage of public criticism because of some alleged misdeed. The Chief Minister had to announce the appointment of a Committee to enquire into these allegations. Likewise, the Congress (I) ministers were also not spared by the people. Mula Ram came in for lot of flak and the matter also went to the law courts.

Besides the growing corruption of the ministers and the bureaucracy, and the mistrust between the parties, there was the problem of internal feud within the Congress (I) which precipitated a crisis. Mufti's resignation from the party had created the problem of appointing a new incumbent for the post of President of the Pradesh Congress (I) Committee. There were a number of

contenders in the line. After a great deal of infighting, Ghulam Rasool Kar was appointed to the post. Kar had to make several trips to Delhi to plead his case. Ultimately, however, the decision of the high command was not welcomed by the rank and file of the party. People were aware of these developments and the youths were restive. They were provided with money by interested parties to create unrest. For the unemployed youth it was an ideal combination of recreation with money while being used to provoke ill-will against the state as well as the Central Govt.

The government was an inefficient spectator of the impending chaos. "Bandhs" were called on trivial protests and the hoodlums had a field day in their encounters with the state apparatus. People were openly saying in the streets that the National Conference workers were fomenting these troubles in order to get rid of the Congress (I) from the coalition government. Whatever the reasons, the situation was fast deteriorating. It was amazing to see the N.C. and Congress (I) workers severely criticizing the performance of their own government.

At this critical juncture, Imam Abdullah Bukhari, Head Priest of Jama Masjid, Delhi came to Srinagar. He made a venomous speech and added fuel to the fire. He said: "The accession of Kashmir to India is not yet final. The Kashmir problem is a live issue needing solution." The political circles were alarmed and the people's doubts were aroused with his provocative speeches.

"If the Head Priest of Delhi can say this, who can prevent us from raising the issue?", asked the common people, who began raising and debating the issue of Kashmir's accession.

"If the Muslims of India feel insecure, and alien in their own country, then who can blame us when we demand something for ourselves?"

With these new developments the secular forces in the state were quite perturbed. They wondered at the indifference of both the State and the Central Governments. The people were disappointed and felt helpless. On the other hand, those who propounded that the accession of Kashmir was not final, were jubilant over Bukhari's speeches. In a single political stroke their morale was boosted sky-high.

In the Allahabad bye-election to the Lok Sabha V.P. Singh won by a thumping majority. By this time people were quite convinced that under the leadership of V.P. Singh many ills of the society would be eradicated and politics would become cleaner. People were aware that corruption in high places was rampant and the newspapers were full of stories about the Bofors gun deal scandal.

In Jammu and Kashmir one could discern a tilt in the political circles towards this new fresh air. Those people who were fed up with the machinations of the Congress (I) and the National Conference, looked upto this new party, which started on a clean slate and was poised to deliver the goods. In the month of August, the National Front was launched as a new political grouping at the Centre. It was a consortium of seven political parties including the left parties C.P.I. and C.P.M. with V.P. Singh as its convenor.

Earlier, the President of Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq had died in a major air crash. The people in Kashmir were quite indifferent to the news. Indeed, people had not forgotten the day, a few years ago, at the time of Bhutto's hanging, when numerous effigies of Zia-ul-Haq were burnt in every part of the valley. But the pro-Pakistan groups, who were ever ready to exploit any such opportunity and rouse people in the name of Islam, were visibly seen mobilizing the people on this occasion.

During Sheikh Sahib's time all these groups could not raise their voices because the majority of people were vigilant and crushed such forces themselves. But now there was no leadership worth the name, and the government watched helplessly. Dr. Farooq's rapport with the people had snapped long back and the National Conference workers were disillusioned and demoralized. They publicly said that Farooq had committed major political blunders from the word go, resulting in their party's ineffectiveness.

On the second day after Zia's death, there was an upsurge in downtown Srinagar. This area had been a frequent scene of agitations over many pretexts. Earlier it was Bhutto's hanging, then it was the Iran-Iraq war; again the explosion of the ammunition dump in Pakistan became an issue; sometimes it was the eruption

of ethnic violence in Karachi; and now it was death of Zia-ul-Haq. Invariably the agitating mobs would direct their activities and launch a tirade against India. Whatever happened anywhere else in the Islamic world, India was the handy scapegoat. The well known reason for these activities was that some groups were paid money by foreign agencies, including Pakistan, and such agitations helped to keep the political pot boiling to be used at the behest of others. This fetched more money into their coffers. Meanwhile, the harassed people, facing scarcity and price hike, would easily fall a prey to their machinations and be provoked into agitating against the State as well as the Central Government.

The fundamentalist groups would also mislead the masses and attempted desperately to give a communal twist to the agitations. This time they even succeeded. Some shops of one community were looted and set on fire. The government did not seem to function because it failed to prevent such events.

The holy occasion of Moharram was being observed. There was a strange tension in the air in the older part of Srinagar. There had been a long tradition of taking out the Tazia processions through the streets of Srinagar which was led by a white Arabian steed. Instead of the procession taking place, the whole of Srinagar city was placed under curfew, to avoid riotous clashes between the two communities. It was at this time that another problem added to the woes of the people. Wheat flour of poor quality was distributed to people at the government controlled ration shops everywhere. "Chapatis" made from this flour became like chewing gum which would melt on the hot pan. The baked chapati would become black and look like a piece of hard wood. It was sour in taste. A rumour was floated that this flour was poisonous, and those consuming it would lose their hair, even their eyebrows and eyelashes. The bakers closed their shops for many days as a protest against the government. People stopped buying any flour from ration shops.

Chapter 25

The Downhill Slide

IN this kind of situation even the bureaucrats did not seem to be keen to do their duty. There was growing apathy in their ranks and they would merely collect their monthly salaries without doing much work. People felt helpless and although they knew that the State was drifting towards total chaos, they were hardly able to arrest the downhill slide.

In the district of Anantnag there was a devastating flood the kind of which was witnessed by the people after three decades. Vast areas were flooded, with fields, houses, homes and schools drowned under water. Standing crops of paddy over vast areas were destroyed by the floods. In order to assess the flood situation and the losses Dr. Farooq flew over the area in a helicopter. As soon as his helicopter landed at one spot, and he set his foot on the soil, he faced the people's wrath which culminated in a hail of stones hurled at him. Immediately, he flew away from the scene in his copter to save his skin. This area used to be a bastion of National Conference at one time, where the leaders would be welcomed with bouquets and garlands. Now, the leader was being hurled with shoes, sandals, stones and abuses. People did not receive any relief in time, what was given to them later was too late and too little.

The leaders of the MUF were calculatedly projecting to the people the failures of the government on many fronts. The government was put very much on the defensive. The MUF also proclaimed that democracy was being strangled in the valley. In the month of October A.G. Lone of the People's Party, Qazi Nissar of the Ummat-i-Islamia and Ali Shah Gilani of Jamat-i-Islami were released from their judicial confinements. Immediately after their release they began a massive tirade against the

government and it appeared they were inciting people towards a major revolt against it. The MUF leaders also attracted people's attention in other ways.

"Where is the urgent need to build two hundred crore worth Golf courses, when there is acute shortage of electricity, telecommunication and transport in the state?" They also raised the issue of rehabilitation of Hindu refugees of 1947 from Pakistan in the Jammu region and insisted that they should not be settled in the state.

Although the MUF leaders and others of likeminded parties did not accept the finality of State's accession to India, yet at the time of elections to the Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assembly they swore by the Constitution of India. People did not, however, appreciate these subtleties.

The opposition parties had been obsessed with the one point programme of toppling the Congress (I)-N.C. coalition government in the state so that fresh elections would be held. One day, Abdul Majid Khan visited me along with a friend of his. Mr. Majid is a teacher whom we knew very well, and who was a staunch supporter of the Jamat-i-Islami with a firm belief in its ideals and programmes. Often we used to discuss local issues in a friendly atmosphere. He observed:

"Didn't I tell you that Farooq would ruin the National Conference? People had great expectations from him. But I knew he wouldn't succeed. You did not believe me."

"I had never imagined that the National Conference would come to such a sorry pass", I sighed sadly.

"If they would not have rigged the elections, nobody would have a grudge against him. If the MUF had won, we might have got a better administration and a cleaner system", Majid emphasized his point excitedly.

"Who knows, whether we would get better administration? They are not angels either?" He appeared perturbed at what I said.

"In Islam it is said that the person who is corrupt has to be severely punished. His hands should be chopped off so that he might never succumb to this practice again. And those who do not mend have to be stoned to death". Saying this he recited an Arabic

couplet and explained its meaning. I did not stretch the argument any further and asked him the reason for his visit? Majid pointed towards his friend and said:

"This gentleman is one of the top-star candidates of Jamat-i-Islami. We want fresh election. The sooner it's done, the better it would be. But it appears the Central Government is in deep slumber. You have to play a part in waking them up."

"Wake them up? Whom?", I was surprised.

"Rajiv Gandhi, who else? He has turned a blind eye to events here and Kashmir would be in flames before he wakes up. If the Assembly is not dissolved and fresh elections ordered, then they will be sorry!" Mr. Majid's friend said: "I feel the same way. But I don't know Rajiv Gandhi and I haven't ever met him."

"I cannot do anything about this", I said expressing my inability in the matter. "But you must be knowing someone." Majid persisted. "This message must reach there. We have done our duty. Now you should do your best too. Whatever will happen otherwise will be according to Allah's design."

"How long are they going to thrust governments on us from Delhi? What kind of democracy is this?", Majid's friend said.

"If elections are held again, are both of you going to fight them?", I asked, by the way.

"I will not, but from our constituency this young man will be our candidate", Majid put his hand over the youngman's shoulder.

The Coalition Government was already in the doldrums. It appeared that the fall of this set-up was imminent because G.R. Kar, a member of the coalition cabinet, and President of the J & K P.C.C.(I) forcefully criticized the Government at a public meeting of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) held in Srinagar. He blamed the Government for giving encouragement to militant activity and not paying attention to the progress and development of the state, which was the main objective behind the coalition arrangement. He complained about rampant corruption and the inferior treatment given to Congress (I) ministers in comparison with ministers from the National Conference. He pointed out that many important decisions were taken by the

Chief Minister without consent of the Congress (I) ministers who were informed verbally about them after the action had been executed.

Before the elections many stalwarts of the N.C. were much against the accord. They were kept out of the cabinet. However, after the elections Farooq had to induct them in his ministry. It was common knowledge, however, that these very ministers were sabotaging the accord from within. Even though Farooq knew what was happening, he chose to maintain an ostrich-like attitude, with the result that the relationships between the coalition parties soured badly. Even under these critical circumstances, leaders from both the sides were keen to secure a berth in the cabinet. When they sensed that the Chief Minister was not keen to oblige them, they used the only weapon they had against him. They made allegations against the corruption and misdeeds of their own Government publicly. Indeed, these proceedings were ludicrous.

With these outbursts from Kar and other Congress (I) leaders, the Delhi "Darbar" was alarmed. They were not certain though about the veracity of the allegations made against the Government. It seemed that they were also not paying much attention to Kashmir. Under these conditions Pakistan now saw the opportunity of a life time for meddling in Kashmir. A deteriorating political situation in the valley provided Pakistan the needed impetus to fulfil their long cherished desire of grabbing Kashmir. They perceived this moment as ideal to see their dream come true. They provided a massive fillip to the activists in the valley working for them. Dr. Farooq also publicly admitted that thousands of Kashmiri youth had crossed over to Pakistan to get arms training in camps which were set up in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) and Rawalpindi.

After the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan, the Afghan refugees in Pakistan were not prepared to go back to their country. One of the reasons was that they were now well entrenched in the lucrative business of drugs, arms and ammunition. They were also getting lot more money from all over the world. Many of these refugees were induced by the Government of Pakistan to give the youth from Kashmir training in the use of

arms and terrorist techniques. Thereby Pakistan sought to kill two birds with one stone.

On 12th November 1988, V.P. Singh paid a visit to Kashmir in his capacity as President of the Janta Dal. I went to the airport along with my colleagues to receive him. Some members of the party had come from Jammu as well. He came by an early morning flight and was seated in a car with Mufti Sayeed and a caravan of cars, taxis and buses followed him to the residence of Mufti on the outskirts of Srinagar. It was an exceptionally warm sunny day in mid-November and we were introduced to V.P. Singh in the open lawns of Mufti's home. We were impressed by his cultured ways as he was talking to us. We felt that he had the qualities to lead the country towards progress. I was meeting him for the first time. He seemed to have a good sense of humour.

He said: "These days the flights in which I travel are delayed deliberately by an hour or two so that I should not reach public meetings in time. I am amazed to see that I arrived here rather early." He laughed as he made these remarks.

From Mufti's home at Nawgam we proceeded on a tour of district Anantnag which had been severely affected by floods. We passed through Pulwama and other towns and villages of the district. Our arrival was welcomed by people and womenfolk sang songs of welcome in Kashmiri and showered "shirin" over V.P. Singh and Mufti Sayeed. After we had lunch at the Khannabal Dak Bungalow, we went to the Chinki chowk in Anantnag for a public meeting. Crowds filled the chowk and people were watching the proceedings from the windows of their homes and from shops surrounding the chowk. People were impatient to hear V.P. Singh and I was somewhat surprised to see such a large congregation.

I was curious about the massive crowd and wondered if the people were really interested in the new party? There could be two reasons for this crowd, I thought. Firstly, V.P. Singh had been in the news headlines for many months, and had an important place for himself in national affairs. Secondly, any person who had taken it upon himself to challenge the Congress (I) Government for its many follies, was a friend of Kashmiris. People also dis-

liked the National Conference leadership and had turned up for this meeting with a vengeance. They were, however, lukewarm towards Mufti Sayeed.

V.P. Singh spoke to the people after local leaders and Mufti Sayeed had spoken. His speech was simple and down to earth. He blamed Rajiv Gandhi for his short-sighted policies. Singh also criticized Rajiv Gandhi's habit of announcing publicly about huge amounts of grants for the states when actually the coffers of the Union Government were empty. Although he spoke against the Congress (I) and Rajiv Gandhi, the response of the audience was not enthusiastic. There was no reaction to his speech. There was no political rhetoric in his speech. However, he concluded his speech by throwing a challenge to Farooq Abdullah and Rajiv Gandhi to come and deliver a speech in the Chini chowk of Anantnag.

We returned back from the function straight to the Srinagar airport where V.P. Singh was given a warm send off by us.

In the month of December Dr. Farooq was a guest at the annual meeting of the J & K Chamber of Commerce. He delivered an extempore address on this occasion which was totally irrelevant. The rapidly deteriorating situation of law and order was already troubling him. Besides there were some allegations made in the local press about his former connection with the JKLF. It was said that the JKLF was still considering Dr. Farooq a part of their party.

I proceeded to Jammu to attend the first convention of the Janta Dal in the state. Before the formation of the Janta Dal, the other parties like Lok Dal and Janta Party were merged together and a new broadbased party emerged. Also some members of Congress (I) were attracted to this new party. In fact, I saw for the first time several different leaders from different political parties on the same platform. These people included Mufti Sayeed from Congress (I); Sheikh Abdul Rahman of Lok Dal; Dhan Raj Bargartra from Janta Party, Balwan Singh and Om Chopra from Congress (I); Talib Hussain and myself from the N.C.

Until they came together, these people were spreading their message from different platforms. Their ideologies and political

perceptions were also different. Earlier they used to criticize each other publicly and now they shared the same platform, common ideology and the same slogans. I could see all of them were feeling quite uneasy in their new role. Even in their public speeches I could see a distinct tilt in their ideas towards the previous party ideology. But a new unity of purpose was a historic need at this juncture and everyone was keen and tried his best to make the new party work well.

I went to Jammu in the company of Abdul Rahman Lone who was formerly a staunch worker of the Congress (I) and was now in the Janta Dal. He borrowed a car from his friend Nissar Ahmed who was driving. Qazi Afzal, who was the District President of the Janta Dal and G.N. Namtahali were also accompanying us in the car. I will, however, never forget this journey all my life. Nissar Ahmad, the owner and driver of the vehicle, believed that his car was an aeroplane and he went racing ahead at jet speed. The vehicle was old, and as it rattled along at terrific speed it went on shedding its loosened parts along the way. So at every few kilometres our car needed repairs and replacement of parts. This took hours. The brakes of the vehicle failed as we were coming downhill on the other side of Banihall mountain. The car simply rolled down at breakneck speed until, God knows how and why, it bumped against a massive boulder which virtually stopped it. As the car halted we shouted in one voice "Hai! Oh! Ya Allah! Om!" Everyone's face had turned pale with fear. But Nissar Ahmad put up a brave face pretending to show that he was not frightened at all. In order to break the silence and cheer up everyone, Abdul Rahman said:

"Nissar Ahmad could have taken us to Jammu within three to four hours! He makes it to Delhi in eight hours! But today his car betrayed us!"

"Did he have any mishap before? The way we have had just now". Namtahali asked sarcastically while he looked frightened.

"Allah be thanked! Never before has any untoward accident happened. Besides, Nissar is an expert in such situations", Abdul Rahman replied, boasting about his friend and keeping him in good humour at the same time.

“Our meeting is tomorrow and there is no reason to hurry or be impatient. Please go slow”, Qazi Afzal pleaded.

“Nissar, treat this car as a car! We are not taking part in a racing competition, nor are we in any dead hurry.” I said irritably.

“Allah be thanked! We are safe. We would have been torn into shreds.” Qazi Afzal had not recovered from the shock of the accident as yet.

Another amusing accident took place around the same time. A news item appeared in the papers with the following words:

“Farooq himself is a hot air balloon drifting with the wind in all directions.” As it turned out, the Chief Minister accompanied by some of his friends had gone for a joy ride in a hot air balloon brought for the purpose from Delhi. During the flight its controls went haywire and the balloon along with its VIP occupants drifted in the air. People came out on the roofs and the streets of Jammu and shouted. The security personnel keeping the track of the Chief Minister on the ground were extremely upset about the situation. The balloon drifted towards Nagrota hills some ten kilometres away from Jammu. Finally, the balloon got stuck in a tree in the forest, and somehow, with lot of difficulty the occupants were rescued and brought down.

Troubles were brewing throughout the year 1989 right from the start. There was not a single day when some incident did not occur in the valley. Bomb blasts, killings, clashes amongst mobs and police, and cross firing between the militants and armed police were the most common events. One could hear the sound of gun fire and bomb blasts everywhere. People were extremely frightened and unhappy as a consequence. They were also dumbfounded, not knowing what to do. However, as these events became a daily routine, they got accustomed to them.

I remember the day when fourteen passengers in a Punjab Roadways Bus were brutally killed by terrorists in Punjab. At that time the tragic incident gave shivers to people all over the country and loud protests were heard against such a heinous crime. As these killings became part of our lives, they were getting used to

the new phenomenon of terrorism and consequent violence.

On 13th January 1987, a big procession was taken out in the streets of Jammu on the occasion of Guru Purb in honour of the Sikh Guru. As the procession passed through the streets, provocative slogans were shouted by some young people. These slogans were against India and pro-Khalistan. The whole atmosphere became surcharged. There were counterslogans from other groups and they clashed. The riotous mob of youths became instantly dehumanized and in the prevailing chaos, it was difficult to know who started the faracas, who got killed and who were the killers. Many innocent people, however, lost their lives and property because they just happened to be around. When the situation was brought under control within a few hours, one could not believe the destruction one saw. God knows how many people were killed. Many shops were looted and gutted. More than a hundred vehicles were burnt.

At this critical hour, Governor Jagmohan took charge of the law and order into his own hands. He inspected Jammu city in a helicopter and located the places where shops and houses were burnt down. When Dr. Farooq was questioned about the holocaust, he played innocent. Most people with commonsense believed that allowing the procession at this time was an unwise decision in view of the difficult law and order situation in Punjab as well as Kashmir. Curfew was imposed on Jammu city for several days before things became normal again. With these developments people in Jammu also became furious against the inefficient government.

With the growth of communal frenzy in the state, the secular elements suffered a great setback. Earlier these very forces would crush communal uprisings but now it seemed there was no vigour left in these parties. They were ineffective in curbing the growing virus of communalism. They seemed to be drifting without the rudder of good leadership.

Events in Jammu created reverberations in the valley too. On 11th February, all militant groups gave a call for a "bandh" in Srinagar. The "bandh" was a total success. The people did not venture to come out of their homes. Shopkeepers were not sure

whether they should open their shops or not. There was no guarantee for their safety by the government. In this month, the Chief Minister along with some of his officials went on a tour, at government expense, to Australia for promoting Kashmir tourism. People were angry and furious about this tour. The local papers carried criticism and cartoons about the Chief Minister's visits abroad.

Pakistan was jubilant over the growing opportunities it was getting for its objective of grabbing Kashmir. They knew that unless there is internal turmoil in the valley, their designs won't succeed. Although money from Pakistan was being used for a long time for such deeds, yet due to the towering presence of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, their plans and plots had not taken hold at all. With Sheikh at the helm the people stood rock like behind him.

On February 13th, there was another "bandh" in the city. This time it was to register an angry protest against the controversial book, *The Satanic Verses*, by Salman Rushdie of England. In his "Fatwa" (order) the religious and political leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini had given a call for the execution of Salman Rushdie for his blasphemous writing against Islam. Even those who were associated with the publication of the book got threatening calls from various groups in England. (At the time of writing these lines, one Italian author has been attacked and wounded; a Japanese author who translated the book has been killed; and Salman Rushdie has been divorced by his wife, and he is in perpetual hiding to save his life.)

The "bandh" was observed throughout the valley and clashes occurred between the police and people. As usual tear gas shells were burst and bullets fired in the air to disperse mobs which were difficult to control. The protests were initially about the book, but other issues were soon added on. The people raised the question of the hanging of Maqbool Butt. Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, raised the question of Kashmir during her official tour to China and the people in the valley knew about these developments. With the growing success of their calls for "bandhs" the morale of the fundamentalist and extremist groups was boosted

beyond their own expectations. They would reinforce their arguments by saying: "If USSR can vacate its troops from Afghanistan, why can't India leave the soil of Kashmir?"

Under these national and international conditions, there were many doubts, arguments and discussions about the future amongst the people. The government and its bureaucracy was deteriorating fast. Corruption was endemic. Unemployment was high and people were disenchanted. The whole of Srinagar was agog with rumours that independent Kashmir was almost round the corner. With their fertile imagination the people were soaring high with hopes of a wonderful future where bounties of life were more than assured. With mounting propaganda going on, people were unwittingly attracted towards the new ideology, having become convinced that the Islamic system of government would remove their misery and bring new prosperity. Thereby began the story of people providing money, shelter, food, and moral support to those who were working for this cause.

When the Union Government and the State government woke up from their slumber, it was too late. The intelligence setup seemed to be unaware of the rapid growth of terrorism in the valley. The Central Govt. made a scape-goat of the Coalition Government in the state. Their argument was that if there had been a crack down on militant hide-outs well in time, then the situation would not have deteriorated to this extent. According to Home Ministry's information there were not only hide-outs but also huge dumps of arms and ammunition in the valley which had been collected over many years from across the border.

Around this time the Director General of the Intelligence Bureau, M.K. Narayan, visited the state. After observing the conditions in the valley, he commented that there was enough sophisticated arms and ammunition available with the militants. They were well trained in their use and could strike against the police force at any moment.

To begin with, the militants struck at those people who were connected with the government. Ali Mohammed Sagar, a Minister in the Farooq Cabinet, was struck with stones and lathis. Had the police not rescued him in time he would have been killed. The

people however were not quite aware of what was really going on. Nobody informed them. Rumours added to the confusion. In the beginning the people thought that the activities were merely the naughty misdeeds of the young people.

A tragic incident occurred in the heart of the old city of Srinagar. An eighteen-year-old boy took out a pistol and showed it to his aunt proclaiming with some bravado: "Look, with this weapon we are going to win freedom." His aunt laughed, thinking he was just joking and she said, "Keep quiet. We have seen many heroes like you before. You mean to win freedom with this pistol." She said this in a sarcastic tone, believing the pistol to be a toy. The youngman was infuriated over her remarks. Without any more thought, he had pulled the trigger and hit his poor aunt in the thigh saying angrily: "Don't you ever think again that this weapon is a fake."

In the month of March the state police unearthed a huge quantity of arms and ammunition which included thirty six Klashnikov guns. It also became known that many thousands of young men, trained in guerrilla warfare by Pakistan, were pouring into the valley from across the border. These youngsters were trained to handle sophisticated weapons. Some of these militants were captured by the police. Among them was the leader of the Muslim Liberation Front (MLF), Ansar-ul-Islam, who gave details about Pakistan's involvement in providing the finances and the weapons for these operations. According to his statement, the JKLF was fighting for complete independence while the MLF wanted Kashmir to accede to Pakistan.

According to their initial plans, the militants handled the bomb blasts in the earlier days with utmost care and discretion. While they blasted a shop, vehicle or a house, there was no loss of human life, but a lot of terror in the population, which did not necessarily alienate them from the militants' cause. However, this strategy did not last long. On the 14th and 17th of March two major bomb blasts occurred in the Hari Singh High Street in the Civil Lines, killing two persons instantly and injuring many others. The blasts had affected two Punjabi households of businessmen who had their roots in the valley for over a hundred years,

but were considered outsiders by the militants. These incidents terrified the Punjabi-speaking businessmen, who thought that anything could befall their lives and property under the prevailing circumstances.

The authorities claimed that many militants were nabbed by the police but at the same time many of those arrested were released on parole according to the law. Among those arrested, two youths were reported to be relatives of some senior police personnel.

The print media in the valley published a lot of news about the militants' activities, as well as some of their day to day commands to the people. In their orders they directed the people to strictly observe the Islamic laws. Many of these rules were, in particular, applicable to the female population only. It was decreed that women shall cover their heads with the "dupatta" (cover cloth for the head); wear a proper veil over their body; not trim their hair; nor use any cosmetics whatsoever. Watching movies in cinema halls or even on video was forbidden for all. Drinking was totally prohibited. These orders culminated in the closure of all cinema houses, video shops and wine shops in the valley.

For a while the people did not take such dictates seriously and they were made to pay a price for that in terms of damage done to their person or property. A cinema hall was blasted in Sopore town which killed and injured many people. The wall of the residence of the Deputy Superintendent of Police was also blasted which sent shock waves of fear in the populace.

There was no security which the law and order authorities could provide to the people. They did not know where to go and seek help. As the government machinery got more and more involved with the control of militancy, it was rendered ineffective and paralysed. The militants got a firmer grip over the people. They were annoyed with the Government for its apathy and ineffectiveness.

The number of militant groups were also rapidly growing every day. The youth were gripped by a growing intransigence. They used abusive language against their elders who tolerated that

without even a murmur. They would also sarcastically pass such remarks as : "We have seen what great deeds you old foggies have accomplished. Now it's our time, we'll show you what we can achieve. In 1947 you sold Kashmir for a song."

Strangely, having seen such dramatic change in the behaviour of the youth—with their bold assertions against the former system and the critical remarks about their elders—the people did not subsequently seem to be unduly alarmed about their children's attitudes or activities, nor even offended by their accusations. On the other hand, these pungent remarks were accepted. They believed that the new generation would achieve what they had failed to do. People were proud of the assertiveness of the new generation, and they were certain about their success in achieving heroic deeds.

The people, however, realised that the new clout of the youth came from the weapons to which they now had free access, and which they used in fighting against the police. The bravado and activities of the militants were talked about everywhere with pride, the people feeling that after centuries of deep slumber they had now truly woken up. The labels that had stuck to the people of Kashmir over the centuries that they are lazy, timid, filthy, lousy and "hatto" were now drowned in the roar of bullets and rocket fire. Today, with his head high, the Kashmiri could proclaim: "Nobody can betray me now, and take advantage of my helplessness. I can no longer be dragged along at someone's sweet will. Now I have woken up, woken up from hundreds of years of sleep."

On a sunny day in the month of May, I was sitting in my garden. Four "burqa" (veil) clad persons came towards me. Until they lifted their veils up, I could not recognize them. I was scared. They boldly stopped in front of me and lifted their veils. On seeing and recognising them, I heaved a sigh of relief. "You people scared me to death. Why are all of you wearing the 'burqa' today? I have never seen you wearing this before."

These were four ladies who were formerly workers of the National Conference. After the split of the party they had joined the N.C. (Khalida). I had known them for a long time and had

helped them in many ways. Therefore, they were frequent visitors to my home.

"I don't know how to walk when wearing a 'burqa'. I shall get used to it soon", Raja said.

"I am already used to it. No problem for me", added Mala.

"Now, we shall have to learn all these ways, otherwise we might face their wrath", Fazi said.

"Indeed, if you ask me, we had become immodest, and somewhat coquettish. Modesty and traditional inhibitions had been thrown aside", Khurshida was saying.

I was attentively listening to their conversation and was keen to perceive what was the influence of the revolution on their thinking. I kept the dialogue going and asked: "If there is no veil, won't women be able to stay modest?"

"Pardon me Khemlaji! What shall I say? How openly are girls moving about with their hair trimmed and exhibiting their bodies? I believe, in the first place, the parents of these girls should be taken to task and severely punished."

"It will be difficult for poor people to stitch veils", Raja said hesitatingly. But no sooner had she uttered these few words the other ladies stopped her.

"How does poverty come into the picture? People have money to spare for everything else. For a Muslim lady it is a sin to exhibit any part of her body", Khorshi was explaining in such a way as if she had just learnt the lesson first hand from the sacred scriptures.

From their conversation in my presence, I could clearly see that the propaganda made by the fundamentalist leaders had made a deep impact on their minds. Men apart, it was the womenfolk who were vehemently enforcing the new regulations on themselves.

"Have you got this new veil stitched for you?", I asked.

"Yes, of course, the tailors are having a very good time these days. There is an enormous sale of every kind of black cloth nowadays. Thousands of yards of cloth are sold. What is more, even poor quality stuff is sold for a song."

"Until Rafiq's veil was stitched, they had given us reprieve for a few days," said Fazi.

"Given you a reprieve? Who had?" I asked in astonishment.

"The Mujahids! Who else?"

"Mujahids?" I said while I felt the ground slipping under my feet. Collecting my wits I asked again, "Where did you meet them?"

In reply she smiled, came closer to me and whispered into my ear. "The biggest Mujahid is Khorshi's nephew."

When the ladies had left, I sat alone reflecting on the fast deteriorating situation in the valley. I was very sad, more so because the people were sliding with their eyes open, in broad daylight, and with full knowledge of realities, into a quagmire from which it would take ages to come out again. The greatest surprise was that while even children in the valley knew what was going on before them, the Governments of the state and the Centre were quite oblivious. Could it be that these things were not known to the special police agencies? The common man had no reply to these questions. At best he remained an anxious and worried spectator of the growing Frankenstein before his eyes.

The Central government pretended to be concerned but did not really do anything. Nor did such of their actions make any difference to the activities of the extremists. The Central leaders were more keen to sort out the internal squabbles, indiscipline in the State Congress (I), and matters related to formation of a coalition government with the National Conference. Many senior Congress leaders were of the view that unless they were made a part of the state Government, the political situation in the state would go from bad to worse. In order to clear this muddle, the Central leaders formed a high level committee with Home Minister Buta Singh and K.C. Pant as its members. A delegation under their leadership visited Kashmir.

Soon after the committee's visit the state cabinet was expanded by Dr. Farooq to include eight new Ministers who were sworn in by the Governor. Among them were Ghulam Rasool Kar, Mangat Ram Sharma and Maulvi Iftikar Hussain Ansari, three senior leaders of the party representing different rural and urban interests. To the people at large this exercise on the part of the state and Central leaders seemed to be trivial in comparison

with the needed measures to prevent the downhill slide of the polity in the valley.

P.L. Handoo was a Minister in the Cabinet of Farooq. One day his home in Anantnag was set on fire. This incident caused a wave of fear in the minds of Kashmiri Hindus. However, the fear did not persist for long. The reason for the fear not persisting was that a rumour was spread that the extremists involved in such acts would only selectively destroy the property of political leaders, particularly of those belonging to the N.C. or the Congress (I).

Those youths who had training in use of arms in special camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK), were now working to entice more youth into their ranks from their respective localities. On seeing that the people were favourably disposed towards their cause, they (the youth) were enlisting into the new ranks at lightning speed. At this time, one day, I met Mohi-ud-din who had grown up with us in the same family. He had played with my brothers. Everybody lovingly called him Mahda, the short form of Mohi-ud-din in Kashmiri.

It is a common practice in Kashmir among Hindus as well as Muslims to shorten the first names in such a way that the original names would show their Kashmiri identity clearly. Thereby one could not even make out by name alone whether a person is a Hindu or Muslim. Thus, Abdul Ghani becomes "Ghana" in Kashmiri as does Ganesh Das. Mohi-ud-din and Maheshwar Nath a Muslim and Hindu name respectively, would have the common short form "Mahya". Similarly Ghulam-ud-din and Dina Nath were commonly called "Dina". Now under the influence of the Klashnikov culture "Kashmiriat" was getting new dabs of colour from umpteen directions rendering it ugly and disfigured. There were many names which were rooted in Kashmiri language being used by both groups with equal pride like Zoonmal and Saray for ladies, and Iqbal Nath, Iqbal Ahmed or Lassa Kaul and Lassa Bhat for men.

Mahda was like a member of our family. As I met him I asked instantly: "Where have you been all these days?"

"It's difficult to come out of home these days. There is need to keep a close watch on my children," he said.

"I hope Jalla and Nazira are not getting astray?" I asked him referring to his two sons.

"Nobody is shielded from this storm today. And boys are boys, if someone offers them monetary inducements they will join with him instantly."

"Who's inducing the boys? Who pays the money?", I asked him, my curiosity considerably aroused.

"Those very people! Who else? On the first encounter they are paid fifty rupees to come to the meeting at the mosque. Next time he gets fifty rupees again. If he persists and becomes motivated, he gets a much larger amount for going across to Pakistan for training in arms."

"Mahda, please for God's sake, remain alert. Don't let your children play with this kind of fire", I said.

"There is an obsession of religious fervour amongst youngsters. And above all, what has this government given us anyway? Can you spell out what we have achieved from this government?", he was saying all this excitedly.

"Do you know what will be the consequences of all these actions?"

"This corrupt government will be dislodged and then we shall have our own government."

"Our own government?" I asked.

"A government whereby all will become equal. I desire that my children should also become great officers of the government. Is it the privilege of these corrupt people only to become officers?", Mahda said angrily.

This was the state of mind of the people that was being exploited, and thousands of innocent Kashmiris were being dragged emotionally into a dreamland of sweet fantasies. People were flying high on the wings of well tailored rumours and falling over totally for the beautiful dreams. This was the kind of naked exploitation perpetrated on the simple, loving and innocent people of Kashmir.

And while this was going on, the political leaders within the government and without, were swerving within a whirlpool of political confusion. And they were making ridiculous speeches.

Dr. Farooq made the first of those statements alleging that the news about bomb blasts, rioting, and other incidents were exaggerated by the media. On the other hand, he was also saying that Pakistan was directly meddling in Kashmir and creating a war like situation in the valley. The Congress (I) President, G. Rasool Kar went on record as saying that CIA was behind the turmoil in Kashmir. G.M. Shah lamented that the wrong policies of the Central Government regarding Kashmir had resulted in the present rot. He also said that Dr. Farooq's being the Chief Minister of the state will cause grave damage to the polity.

Mir Waiz Maulana Farooq declared in his speeches that Dr. Farooq had initiated a war against the people, and he further alleged that Farooq had made the relations between India and Pakistan even more complicated, and by his actions he had made the politicians of Kashmir irrelevant.

Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, who was now a leader of the newly formed Janta Dal, blamed the government of Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre and held it responsible for pushing Kashmir into the present turmoil. The Congress (I) was hoping to use the Kashmir card, to divert people's attention to win a decisive victory in the forthcoming elections for stability and national integrity. Abdul Rashid Kabuli, M.P., who had won his seat in the Parliament on the N.C. ticket and was now the lone member and chairman of the J & K Democratic Forum, declared publicly that Dr. Farooq was behind all these acts of bomb blasting and turmoil using this as a tool to blackmail the Centre and acquire greater powers for himself as Chief Minister. Dr. Mustafa Kamal, younger brother of Farooq, and a Minister in his cabinet, blamed Governor Jagmohan for sending exaggerated reports to the Centre about the prevailing situation in the state. He also alleged that the Governor was thereby concealing the reality from them.

The resentment brewing amongst the workers of the National Conference was somewhat reduced due to the expansion of Farooq's cabinet. They were apprehensive about withdrawal of support by the Congress (I). The N.C. was riven with fear, firstly about the fall of the government and secondly, due to the people's anger against it. For the moment the expansion of the ministry

seemed to have postponed the day of reckoning.

The opposition politicians in the state had a single point programme, namely, that of seeing the fall of the Farooq ministry. They were keen to force fresh elections for the state legislature. As of that moment their agenda was simply that. People also were of the same view. However, the MUF which was born just before the previous elections, did not feel fulfilled about its role, and quickly began to disintegrate. A. Ghani Lone of the People's League was trying his utmost to save MUF and maintain its solid entity. He wanted to use a common platform and a common programme in a united effort to win the elections. As a result of his efforts small opposition groups like the Panthers Party of Professor Bhim Singh, and the Democratic Forum etc., did agree to merge with the joint Opposition Front. But, the leaders of these groups had so many differences that the Opposition Front was doomed from its very inception.

It was obvious from the statements and counter-statements of all the political leaders that all of them were eager to fill the political vacuum created after the demise of Sheikh Abdullah. The wrestlers were in the arena, as it were, and the spectators were watching in hordes. But, the crowds were without their leaders. There was a widespread vacuum looming large. Political leaders of different hues were keen to fill the vacuum. They were using every known tactic to rally people behind them, statements, rhetoric, and emotionally charged arguments, in order that some of it might do the trick. However, to their utter dismay, these well tested weapons, now failed to make any dent on the minds of the youth. The reasons were not far to seek.

More than one lakh young educated people were without any work which included three thousand post-graduates, twelve thousand graduates, and eighteen thousand technicians. They had been waiting to get jobs for many years. The total population of the state is around sixty five lakhs and the literacy rate is twenty six per cent. In spite of the leaders' eager appeals to the youths, there was no response from them. They were already totally disillusioned and complained that hollow promises could never fill their bottomless pits. And all these leaders had been well known to the

youth, they had been tried, tested and understood for what they and their promises were worth. Not only had the youth become cynical but also the public at large had lost faith in political leaders.

Young people were experiencing a new power. They were feeling so confident and exhilarated, that they felt heavens could be at their beck and call, not to speak of conquering the world. They felt, they could get whatever they wanted. The power from the barrel of a gun was now in their hands. People were willing to obey their orders and submit before them out of deep fear. Those who dared to contradict their thinking or actions were made to see reason at the point of the gun. Young men and women in the age group of fifteen to thirty were all engulfed by this whirlwind.

The extremists gave a call for a "bandh" in the bazars of Srinagar. The government wanted to meet this challenge and called a meeting of the traders' representatives to assure them about security. However, when the meeting was going on between the two sides, there was a bomb blast. The blast damaged completely one wall of the building. The traders and government representatives left the meeting immediately. In desperation the government had to bow before the extremists.

During this year, there was not a single day without an incident of this nature. Bomb blasts in shops, homes, under automobiles and elsewhere were so numerous that one lost count. These were combined with "bandhs" and "hartals." Exchange of fire between the militants and the armed police became a daily routine. Such exchanges began to be lovingly called "Crosss-firing", which became the topic of daily conversation.

It was easy to incite the people to find causes for "bandhs". Any event would suffice, for instance, the death anniversary of Ayatollah Khoemeni, the great Shia leader of Iran, was as good an opportunity to mobilize people in their favour.

This kind of continued unrest, caused by the extremists, dwindled the Farooq government, or so it seemed. On the other hand, Farooq would try to cover his frustration and utter failure to prevent the downhill slide by alternately blaming the extremists, the Central Government or the Pakistan Prime Minister Ms.

Benazir Bhutto. There was, no doubt, however, that the valley had come largely under the control of the extremists.

A number of Central leaders visited Kashmir during this period. Home Minister Buta Singh and later S.B. Chavan paid a visit. Other leaders visited the state later. There was no change, however, in the political climate. On the contrary such visits only fuelled rumours about the imminent fall of the Farooq Govt. These rumours were not believed by the public alone, but even the senior leaders of the National Conference were apprehensive and fearful seeing their political boat sinking into the whirlpool.

Over the centuries, Indians have developed a peculiar characteristic. Any government which appears to be weak and unable to maintain safety of public life and property, is ruthlessly uprooted and dismissed from the arena. And surprisingly those who support such governments, when the going is good, do not hesitate to be the first to leave it when the Government's boat is sinking. This was precisely the state of affairs within the N.C.-Congress (I) coalition government.

Unmindful of the activities of the extremists, the leaders were involved in their personal battles. And as a consequence the bureaucrats and the employees of the Government were ruling the roost. The turmoil, the lack of attention from the top, and the administrative chaos, were a God-send for the corrupt. Development activity came to a complete halt. Laxity of administration at all levels enabled the extremists to spread with ease their tentacles far and wide. Black marketing and hoarding became the order of the day. By the time it was August, many innocent people had lost their lives in the valley, either in bomb blasts and cross-firing or as a result of direct gunning down by the militants. Whether the people killed were civilians, soldiers or armed youth did not matter. They were all human beings.

A large number of tourists who were present in the valley at this time were forced to flee because of widely circulated information about impending troubles. Shopkeepers, traders, businessmen, boatmen, houseboat owners and handicrafts dealers and government employees were gravely apprehensive. Everyone believed something terrible was going to happen. From August 12

upto August 20th, there was tension, turmoil and hartal in every part of the town. And, there were bomb blasts at many places. On August 14th, the flag of Pakistan was unfurled in many parts of the city in the interior areas.

Disrespect was shown to the National Flag at some places. On the Independence day, August 15, 1989 there was an eerie silence in Srinagar. Not a single shop opened on that day nor was a single vehicle moving on the road. Nothing indeed was happening on the main streets. Inside the lanes, however groups of youth were congregating near corners and whispering and discussing amongst themselves or moving around from one corner to the other. There was nothing whatever to do and naturally they could only keep the rumour mills going and churn out information of all sorts. Such tasks seemed to take a high priority on their agenda.

The night of 15th August was truly a fearful night, it was a "kalaratri" and seemed as though Kashmir had not as yet discovered the ordinary oil lamp. On the strict orders of the extremists, everyone was directed to observe this night as the blackest night. Due to some negligence a small light bulb remained lighted in our kitchen and the light was visible from outside. Within seconds, a big stone smashed the window panes of the kitchen. We realized the danger and put off the light. Similar experiences were reported by many who had even inadvertently made a slight error in not obeying the extremists orders.

On 17th August 1989, I wrote a letter to Shri V.P.Singh, President of the Jan Morcha, giving him an account of the prevailing political situation.

Soon after began a systematic campaign of selective killings and attack on the residence of prominent people. There was a bomb blast in the residence of Mohd. Shafi Qureshi of the Congress (I) (later he became Governor of Bihar in 1991). Around the same time there was a massive bomb blast near the home of Abdul Samad. A car nearby was totally destroyed. On the 21st of August, a senior political worker of the National Conference, Mohd. Youssuf Halwai, a Block President of the Party, was gunned down by masked militants at Kalashpora in broad daylight. While he was bleeding to death people watched in dread but

nobody dared to remove him to hospital. The terror-stricken shopkeepers nearby were shivering with fear. Thereafter, every day a string of "bandhs" and hartals continued. After the assassination of Mohd. Youssuf Halwai no one dared to ignore the "bandh" declared by the militants.

Many senior media people paid a visit to Srinagar at this juncture. Those who came included Kuldip Nayyar, Pran Chopra and Rajender Sachar. They were accompanied by the senior leader of the Janta Dal, I.K. Gujral (he was later the Minister of External Affairs in the cabinet of Prime Minister V.P.Singh 1989-90). I met Mr. Gujral at Hotel Broadway and apprised him of the political situation in the state. This team of media men, under the leadership of Gujral, had gone out to meet Maulana Farooq at his home, but they were forced to come back without being able to meet him. En route to Maulana's home there was cross-firing at many places. Ultimately, however, they were taken to Maulana Farooq's home in his own car. Dr. Farooq was not sitting and watching idly. He also met the delegation and presented them with apples in hospitality.

The opposition parties gave a call for a "bandh" at the national level on 30th August. There was no response whatsoever to this call in the valley. However, it was on this day that the famous Jama Masjid in Srinagar downtown was washed with milk in order to purify it after having been allegedly desecrated. At the same time the Central Government came in for severe criticism for its notorious "Press Bill". The government felt that there was need to restrain the press by severe censorship in order to prevent the misuse of media, which the Government thought, were prone to sensationalize news and even present them in a distorted manner. This was resented by all sections of public opinion throughout the country. The media persons in Jammu and Kashmir state were unanimous in their voices of protest against what they called the "Black Bill". In Srinagar the media people staged a "Dharna" against the bill.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the newspapers in the state kept on publishing details of the activities of the militants faithfully. On the directions of the extremists groups they also carried

notices, directions and instructions given by them for the information of the public. Directions were issued about bandhs, about employee strikes, when television sets should be put off in the homes, when lights have to be switched off etc. Interviews of extremists with the media were also prominently published in the local press. Understandably, the public got the impression that the print media were backing the extremist cause to the hilt. The four members of the Legislative Assembly belonging to the MUF were directed by the militants to resign their seats forthwith. Three of them resigned immediately and the fourth one, Mir Mustafa, held out against their threat for some time. He was subsequently brutally murdered by one of the militant outfits.

Political workers of the National Conference and the Congress (I) were asked to resign from their respective posts or face consequences. As a result of this, the newspapers in the valley were flooded with messages from political party workers making public statements to the effect that they had abandoned politics for ever and that they had nothing whatsoever to do with any political party or its sub-units. For all practical purposes the local newspapers became the mouthpieces of the extremists. And people began to believe these stories.

The video "Newstrack" was not lagging behind in this race for spicy news. They made a documentary on the activities of the extremists which became a rage in the valley. The youth would pay any price for a copy for viewing it. Interviews with the top militants and an overview of their activities were the highlights of this video story. Their mission was proclaimed and there was discussion about their heroic deeds everywhere.

Those who were adversely affected by the activities of the militants had doubts and apprehensions which left them puzzled and helpless. They wondered that if the photographers and media men can have contacts with these people, how come the police cannot do anything?

There were many causes for this situation as the people perceived them. One was that three people related to senior police officers were caught in these acts. Klashnikov guns were also found in their custody. In spite of this they were going about

places in Srinagar bragging about their antics to people. The son of a DSP was arrested in Anantnag, and later at the recommendation of the officer he was released after preliminary interrogation. Another fact was that under the cover and protection of two ministers of the Farooq Government, a few groups of youth were getting encouragement and monetary help to carry on their nefarious activities. Finally, the police force at the top was riven with dissensions and rivalry and felt highly de-motivated and demoralized. They suffered from poor professional leadership at the highest level and felt their avenues for promotion and growth totally blocked. Under these circumstances, dealing with the terrorist problem received low priority or even none at all. The police force had become like a rudderless boat caught in a whirlpool. People knew quite well that if one group of police was about to catch a terrorist outfit, another police team would leak out the police plan. This enabled the militants to move about unnoticed and unfettered.

In the first week of September there was a massive fire in the famous shrine of Baba Reshi near Gulmarg. The main shrine and the surrounding structures were reduced to ashes. Every Kashmiri pays obeisance at this famous shrine where one can see scenes of traditional spiritual and cultural closeness of Kashmiris of all creeds. People have experienced for centuries that whoever asks for a favour here, in all humility, does not return empty handed. There are hundreds of similar shrines in Kashmir where people of all religions throng and pay their obeisance throughout the year. The unprecedented fire in such a sacred place of worship was, therefore, a cause for great grief for the people who viewed it as an inauspicious divine visitation. The immediate cause of fire was not known. It got mixed up with the prevailing turmoil. Tragic events often happen simultaneously.

On 14th September 1989, Tika Lal Taploo, President of the Kashmir unit of the Bhartiya Janta Party, was gunned down by armed militants at a few hundred metres from his home. His cold-blooded murder sent shivers through every spine. People became extremely sad and acutely worried. Kashmiri Hindus were ever more acutely fearful, and thought that any time the guns could

turn on them. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, JKLF, which had emerged as a frontal and leading organisation of the militants, announced through the newspapers that their assassination attempts will be strictly confined to political people only. However, their assurances did not seem to carry much weight as the spate of killings increased. It did not matter any longer what the JKLF had decreed because already there was a mushroom growth of new organisations with their own command system which carried out activities in accordance with their separate agendas. Ultimately it became impossible to apportion blame to any particular group.

On 15th September Tikka Lal Taploo's last rites were performed. A huge procession of people, Hindus and Muslims, followed his bier through the crowded parts of Srinagar city upto the cremation ground. L.K. Advani of the Bhartiya Janta Party flew to Srinagar to pay his party's homage to Mr. Taploo and he addressed a press conference in which he criticized the gruesome murder. He also expressed grave concern about the armed interference instigated by Pakistan in the valley. He blamed the government of both Farooq in the State, and Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre for the anarchy in Kashmir.

A very unusual and an unheard of event took place in one of the girls schools in the city. One day all the students assembled in the hall for the morning prayer meeting, fainted en masse. The teachers and other bystanders were terribly upset. Nobody could find any cause for the incident. The parents and the elders in the neighbourhood took the school staff and management to task and harassed them. Physicians and psychiatrists were called in to find out the cause, but no solid basis for the fainting could be established. The neighbourhood was however, adamant in its hostile attitude and insisted on the shifting of the school or replacing the teaching staff with youth nominated by them.

It did not take sensible people of the locality a long time to understand who were behind the whole drama and what were their hidden motives.

By now the people had got used to "hartals", bomb blasts, crossfiring, and gunning down of people, every now and then.

Now, there began another phase of organised activity. People were warned through letters written to them, pasted on their homes, or published in the local newspapers about their fate. People associated with national political parties or the National Conference were sent death warrants or similar warnings in very harsh words. Besides, similar warnings and warrants were sent to those who were working in Central Government departments, intelligence agencies of the police, telecommunications, All India Radio, Doordarshan, and so many other similar organisations. With the spread of these threats of death to all and sundry the whole of Kashmir trembled with fear. The newspapers published the names of all those who were on the so-called hit-list of the various extremists groups. Every town, city, mohalla or lane had someone or the other who figured in such lists and therefore, became victims of grave fear and anxiety. These problems were made even more complex by those who used this cruel methodology, purely for selfish reasons, to wreak their vengeance from relatives, neighbours, superiors, or masters. For them too it seemed a golden opportunity for seeking their pound of flesh. Thereby they aggravated the tragic situation even further.

People were in a quandary. Whom would they look upto for guidance? To whom could they appeal for respite? Who would listen to their woes? The Chief Minister who could supposedly have heeded their pleas by virtue of his position in the government, was pretending to be oblivious of the tragic situation. He had, indeed, turned his back to these tragic events and left the people in a lurch. He was having a good time listening to music in Gulmarg. The music was arranged as part of a week-long programme of dance and music jointly by the *Times of India* Group and Department of Tourism, J & K Government. On the one hand, Kashmir had become a plaything in the hands of the terrorists, and on the other, Yamini Krishnamurti was dancing her best. Arson, bomb blasts and assassinations were hurting people to the bones while Farooq Abdullah, his colleagues, and the senior government officials were appreciating the nuances of classical dance and music brought to the valley. After the arrest of Shabir Shah there was a virtual declaration of war in the valley. Shabir

was the General Secretary of the People's League. All the extremists considered him to be their leader at that time. Tales about his bravery and invincibility had been making the round in every home.

Police were in search of him but his whereabouts could not be easily traced. By his bravery and stealth, he had become a hero of the masses. It was inevitable therefore that his arrest by the police caused furore and continued "bandh" for days. At the same time the youth became active and collected donations for their cause from door to door. They collected not only cash but also rice and other commodities for the long struggle ahead. Thereby the sway of the extremists spread fast into every town and village, namely, Badgam, Pulwama, Anantnag, Baramulla and Kupwara. In village Wagoora they gunned down two relations of a police officer. Alongside, there were incidents of arson and many schools, shopping complexes, government offices, and public buildings were burnt to ashes. Under these circumstances with the clout of extremists so clearly demonstrated by them, nobody had the courage to go against their diktats because people realized that by doing so they were only inviting death for themselves.

On October 9th, a large delegation from Pakistan visited Kashmir under official patronage. I think that this was perhaps the first visit of its kind by a civilian group from Pakistan to visit the valley. There were around sixty people in the group, mostly females, wives of senior Pakistani diplomats and bureaucrats. There were women in the party who had senior positions in government themselves. The ladies were officially entertained and taken round places of interest in the valley.

While Kashmir was entangled in the whirlwind of extremism which caused arson, tragedy and turmoil, the Central Government was preoccupied with the strategy and concerns of the forthcoming elections to the Lok Sabha. And Kashmiris in their desperation were looking towards the Centre for succour, the way helpless children look upto a mother.

On the 1st of November our house was the target of an arson bomb, or a petrol bomb as it was now called. The top floor of the building had been struck and as it was mostly wood it had caught

fire instantly. It was around 9 o'clock in the evening and we were seated in the sitting room of the house. There was a sudden burst of light all over the lawns. We realized that a fire had started because the dry turf of the lawn had also caught fire due to burning petrol. We tackled the fire with our own efforts and were very fortunate to have controlled it soon. We realized that worst things could happen because the moods of the people had undergone such a change and there was acute tension in the social environment.

On November 4th, Nil Kanth Ganjoo, a former judge of the court in the state was killed by the bullets of a militant in the Hari Singh High Street of Srinagar. The incident took place in broad daylight and in a very busy marketplace in the heart of Srinagar's Civil Lines. This event further shook all the courage out of the minority of Hindus in the valley who were very anxious and fearful, not knowing what to do in this situation. It was in the court of Nil Kanth Ganjoo that the trial of Maqbool Butt had been conducted, and having found him guilty of murder, the judge had pronounced the death sentence against him. The militants, however, considered Maqbool Butt to be their leader. He had been responsible for the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane to Pakistan some years before.

On the same day my colleague G.M. Bhawan and a leading advocate of the Srinagar bar called on me at my house. Bhawan was extremely worried. I will never forget the things he talked to me.

"Under the present circumstances, all the political parties have become irrelevant. Nobody shall dare to meet this hurricane head-on", he had said.

"We should not lose courage. I believe all this may subside after the Lok Sabha elections."

"It would be too late by then. The situation is no longer the same as it was two months ago. It is worsening rapidly. There is acute tension in the town. The youth call the shots and they are not prepared to listen to anyone. And, who can face them anyway? We are unarmed, and they wield Klashnikov guns like they are toys in their hands. They can silence a person with a bullet

anytime, anywhere they choose."

Bhawan's words turned out to be prophetic. All the political parties were helplessly watching the growing menace of terrorism and anarchy. Processions and congregations of youth became the order of the day. The Ram Janambhoomi and the Babri Masjid controversy in the country and similar other events provided ample excuses for these events whose objective was to rouse the people and bring them into their fold. Everyone was apprehensive. If something untoward would happen in Ayodhya on the 9th of November, there will be bloodshed in Kashmir as well. This day was chosen by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad for laying the foundation of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. However, as the day passed off peacefully, there were no repercussions in the valley. Still the tension was kept up by other means.

The next target of the extremists was the tourism industry. They dealt a severe blow to the trade. Bomb blasts occurred in hotels and "Dhabas" (wayside restaurants). This scared people away and these establishments were locked. The tourists began to run away. Within days the city acquired a graveyard-like silence. People felt they were getting caught into a snare and like rats they were struggling to come out and breathe in an atmosphere of freedom. That was, however, not to be. Their freedom had been curtailed by the extremists and people were suffocating both within their homes and outside.

There was utter chaos in most districts of the valley. Processions, killings, arson, rioting and loot were the routine. Bullets, lathis and tear gas were the weapons in use everywhere. Many areas of Srinagar like Tankipora, Chota Bazar, Habbakadal, Buttamaloo, Fateh Kadal, Lal Chowk, Khanyar, Budshah Chowk, Reshi Mohalla, Dalgate, Maisuma and Hari Singh High Street became the "morchas" of the battle between the militants and the disorganized and demoralized state police force.

In connection with election work I proceeded to Jammu. There was lot of enthusiasm amongst the people for the forthcoming elections and the events in the valley did not affect them much yet. When I returned to Srinagar after some days, I found it like a ghost city. Everything wore a deserted look. From 22nd to 25th

November there was total "hartal" in the city. The "hartals" ordered by the militants were now given the name "civil curfew". (Kashmiris are very fond of coining very pithy new names for every eventuality. Many such words have been coined over the last forty years. It would be a subject of fascinating study for etymologists.) There had been "hartals" and "bandhs" earlier but such a total one had never taken place before. Even animals and birds seemed to have vanished from the scene. All means of transport, cycles, cars, taxis, buses, and "tongas" were off the roads. Far from casting a vote, even moving out on the road could be an invitation to death. People were huddled together in fear within the four walls of their homes.

When the newscaster of Doordarshan showed the booths of Kashmir in the evening news, the booths were empty and the election staff on duty were sitting with folded hands. The extremists had decreed a boycott of the elections. Only the National Conference had nominated its candidates for the Lok Sabha election. P.L. Handoo from Anantnag, Saif-ud-din Soz from Baramulla and Mohd. Shafi Bhat from Srinagar. No public meetings nor any small election meetings were seen to have been organized by the National Conference. Even the nomination papers had been filed in secrecy under heavy police protection.

On 29th November 1989, V.P. Singh was declared to have won the Lok Sabha election. The results in respect of his others colleagues also were pouring in. Although the National Front which comprised Janta Dal of V.P. Singh, Telugu Desam of N.T. Rama Rao, and Communist Party of India, and Communist Party (Marxist), had won a majority in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi and Rajasthan, it had fared poorly in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat with the result that the National Front could not muster a clear majority in the Parliament and form a government on its own. Ultimately, a minority government of the Janta Dal with V.P. Singh as Prime Minister was ushered in with the outside support of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and the Communist Party (Marxist) and C.P.I.

With this change at the Centre, the premises of the Janta Dal office in Srinagar suddenly became very full of life and activity.

As soon as the victory of Janta Dal and its likelihood of coming to power became evident, the office had become an important hub of political activity. People poured in to congratulate the party leaders and many were garlanded with flowers and strings of currency notes!

When the formation of the V.P. Singh ministry was announced at the Centre, people were delighted to find the name of Mufti Mohd. Sayeed as the new Home Minister of the country. A huge crowd of people assembled at the Janta Dal office in Lal Chowk, Srinagar and expressed their jubilation publicly. Unfortunately, however, this new found relief was not to last long. On the 5th of December, Mufti Sayeed took over the office of Home Minister and three days later on 8th December, his daughter, Dr. Rubayya Sayeed was kidnapped by militants while she was on her way from the Lal Ded Hospital to her home a few kilometres away.

The news spread within the country rapidly. Everybody in the valley got emotionally involved with the incident. There was mixed reaction amongst the people. Those who swore by secularism could perceive the incident as a grave threat to their values. The kidnapping of a young unmarried innocent female in this manner was against all norms of Kashmiri behaviour. Sensible and sophisticated people of all castes and creeds, literate or illiterate, urban or rural felt deeply shocked by this episode. Even those who swore by Muslim fundamentalist concerns were not happy over these developments. Everybody voiced the Kashmiri sentiments unanimously: Everyone has daughters and daughters-in-law. This is not done! If this happens to one today, it can happen to others too.

Those who were against Mufti Sayeed for political reasons were trying hard to conceal their glee over Mufti's discomfiture at a critical juncture. The public at large were watching the events in mute silence and did not pronounce the militants guilty on account of fear of reprisals by them.

Mufti Sayeed's home at Nawgam on the outskirts of Srinagar was crowded with people; relatives, well-wishers, and political leaders. The telephone kept on ringing every minute. Fear, apprehension, anxiety, sadness and pain were writ large on every face.

Everyone conveyed their sympathies to the family in this hour of travail. All the relatives of Mufti Sayeed were assembled in a separate room, grim silence prevailed there and the scene was reminiscent of a typical condolence meeting in Kashmir. Mufti Sahib's mother, an old lady, was perplexed and in deep distress. She rubbed her hands as she wailed, "Oh God! why have you brought this 'kayamat' on us?"

For the people of Kashmir a kidnapping incident of this kind was an unheard of experience and therefore, everyone was stunned. I recollect Mufti's mother telling someone, "Has this ever happened to anyone before? We haven't ever heard of such a terrible deed."

Mrs. Mufti was sitting in another room with lots of people, all quiet and grim. She was sad and completely silent. Her eyes were full of tears. Most of Mufti's relations are from the Bijbehara area of the Anantnag district in Kashmir which is situated about 40 kilometres south of the capital city of Srinagar. They were nice straightforward people, not dyed in the intricacies of modern day politics.

The next day, Sayeed Malik, a journalist, his wife Ruqayya and the Editor of *Kashmir Times*, Ved Bhasin, came to Srinagar from Jammu. They are friends of Mufti. Everybody was anxiously awaiting the news of Dr. Rubayya's release and an end of this terrible episode. Sayeed Malik was monitoring the telephone for news. Ved Bhasin was praying—sadness writ large on his face—for the release of Rubayya. The leaders and workers of the J & K Janta Dal were all assembled at this place, some having come all the way from Jammu, in order to express their anxiety and sympathy in this difficult hour.

Zafar Meraj, Bureau Chief of the *Kashmir Times* in Srinagar, was the main person through whom some contact had been established with the militants. He was related to Ruqayya Sayeed, and the well known M.P. late Shamim Ahmed Shamim. Zafar's mother is Shamim and Ruqayya's sister. The members of their families were well acquainted with the Mufti household. Because of the efforts being made by Zafar Meraj for the release of Dr. Rubayya, I asked him:

"How long will it be before she is released?"

"Not before we accede to their demands?" Zafar had said.

"You mean, the release of five militants in exchange?"

"The government is delaying matters. I am really scared."

"What is the way out then?" I asked anxiously.

"Way out? Well, that rests with the government. And you know, how hostile the government is to us?"

Zafar Meraj was doing everything he could, meeting the militants, coming to Mufti's home, meeting the press. It appeared that he had a major role to play in seeking the release of Dr. Rubayya Sayeed and deciding about her fate.

Soon after, I went to the other room and spoke about the matter with Ruqayya.

"Zafar Sahib is terribly worried. God knows what will be the outcome?" I said.

Ruqayya said that the militants had conveyed to Zafar that if their demands are not accepted, then they would kill Dr. Rubayya. I was alarmed.

Although Sayeed Malik's relatives, and Zafar Meraj were present on the occasion, I sensed that Mufti's relatives did not quite like their presence. In fact, they were rather disturbed by their intervention. Mufti's sister-in-law thought that people were using this incident for entertainment.

"This tragedy is not yours alone, we are all deeply concerned", I reassured her. There was a unanimous outcry in the country against this kidnapping. The Grand Imam of the Jama Masjid Delhi, Sayyad Abdullah Bukhari, also issued a strongly worded statement on this occasion condemning the perpetrators of the kidnapping. Even Pakistani authorities issued critical statements against the kidnapping. Many in Kashmir picked up courage to condemn the act, for which action they had to suffer later on at the hands of the militants.

At this time the Chief Minister of the state, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, had gone to U.S.A. for medical treatment. Because of his absence, the inefficiency of the administration, and the scare amongst the workers and leaders of the National Conference, it looked as though the stalemate in efforts to release Rubayya

would not end. In the midst of negotiations began with the militants, Farooq Abdullah returned from the U.S.A. The Central government appointed a sub-committee of the cabinet to resolve the issue. This committee comprised of Arun Nehru, I.K.Gujral, and Arif Mohd. Khan, and they came to Srinagar to get Rubayya released. At the same time Justice M.L. Bhat of the Allahabad High Court also came to Srinagar. Justice Bhat established contact with the militants through Dr. Abdul Ahad Guru, Mir Mustafa, MLA and a citizen Abdul Qayyum. The militants demanded the release of five of their colleagues held in detention by the government against the safe release of Dr. Rubayya. Nobody was certain if the girl would be really released alive.

The leaders of the Janta Dal were also consulting each other over the issue. Party leaders were coming to Srinagar or going to Delhi during these confabulations. D.D. Thakur paid a visit to Srinagar. He had been specifically asked by the Home Minister to assess the situation on the spot. As soon as he arrived in Srinagar on 11th December 1989, we went to meet him at Hotel Broadway. There was a total "bandh" in Srinagar on the day and there was acute tension in the air. It seemed as though the day of judgement was very near. The city was deserted and looked like an eerie cremation ground. Bomb blasts occurred one after the other shaking the buildings and ripping the ear drums. There was smoke rising high up in the sky from burning buildings already target of arson by the extremists. G.M. Bhawan also came to meet D.D. Thakur. Everyone present was apprehensive and anxious not knowing when more lava from the militant volcano would erupt and destroy the valley in its wake. A gentleman dropped in at the Hotel room and informed us:

"Farooq Abdullah says that the militants want the U.N. officials to mediate in the release of Rubayya Sayeed. Until this demand of theirs is accepted the girl will remain in their custody."

As he narrated this information we were stunned. D.D. Thakur had also talked to Farooq in connection with release of Rubayya. Thakur left for Delhi.

At long last the day of Rubayya's release approached. On the 13th December the city was tense. We waited anxiously for

Rubayya at her home. There was a long wait, and the day was over. She didn't arrive. Mufti's house was filled with hundreds of political workers, media persons, relations, and friends. Every half hour we would get news and meanwhile the telephones kept ringing all the time, giving us messages from Delhi, Jammu or elsewhere.

In the midst of all this hectic activity Mufti Sayeed called from Delhi and asked the members of his family to keep themselves ready to fly to New Delhi any minute.

A special plane had been arranged to fly them out of Srinagar. Around 5 o'clock lot more people including number of government officials assembled in the compound of Mufti's house. Right upto 7 p.m. they waited anxiously in the bitter cold of December days. Some police officers also called in. Everyone was weary. In the meanwhile Zafar arrived and rushed straight into the room where many of us were sitting. Instantly, Zafar's mother and Ruqayya got up on their feet and embraced him warmly.

"She will be here soon." Zafar was the focus of everyone's attention. It was obvious he had achieved a great miracle.

At the time of Rubayya's arrival people were arrayed in such a way as if they were meeting her after ages. Her mother, aunts and other close relations stood at the door and as she arrived, Rubayya was swiftly whisked inside. Her mother embraced her, hugged her at the door and took her inside. Everybody's eyes were full of tears and all heaved a sigh of relief. Rubayya's mother patted her on the back and said:

"Please get ready to go to Delhi rightaway."

"I don't have to go to Delhi. Who are they? Why should they order us about? I won't go", Rubayya said crying loudly.

The room was filled with people and Rubayya seated on a bed was crying profusely. She was surrounded by her mother and sisters. Others present were crying too. Ruqayya and I left the room. Mufti's house was no longer a home. It had turned into a busy meeting place. Central ministers and state ministers were congratulating each other here. Senior officers and bureaucrats of the State Government had come to record their presence lest they

be reported absent in the reports going to the ministry of Home Affairs.

The release of five militants in exchange for the release of Rubayya led to a dam burst of extremism in the valley. Today was a day of joy, excitement and celebration in the ranks of the militants and they were openly celebrating the occasion. They received heroes' welcome at many places. Dancing, folk songs, and welcome arches paved the way of their processions. People raised their hands making a V-for victory sign and shouted slogans for freedom. And gradually, imperceptibly the people were drawn into the mainstream of extremism. By now thousands of youth had been already sucked into its vortex and it was only natural that their parents and elders should have shown their encouragement for the youths cause.

On the 14th, 15th and 16th December, Srinagar was placed under severe curfew. Nobody was permitted to move out of their homes. Indeed, there were orders to shoot at sight anyone defying the curfew.

On the 18th December when the curfew was slightly relaxed there were bomb blasts, acts of arson, and destruction of government transport buses at several places. The cafeteria atop the Rustomgarhi hillock near Dalgate was burnt to ashes. Youths were running around to mosques in order to get details about the next day's programme. Those who would not like to go, had to go lest they be the victims of the wrath of the extremists.

Times were changing rapidly all over the globe. Dramatic and revolutionary changes were taking place in the political scenario of many lands. And the news about these were seen by the people on the television in their homes. Many republics of the U.S.S.R. namely Lithuania, Azerbaijan and others were struggling to secede from the U.S.S.R. These struggles provided a shot in the arm of the extremists in Kashmir. The revolution in Romania also came close on the heels of others in the same month of December. Seeing all these dramatic changes, the people of Kashmir believed that some kind of freedom was just round the corner, waiting to kiss their feet. They had to struggle and in one go break open the door so that freedom can walk in. Everybody spoke the same

language and said:

"If the President of Romania, Checissco could be shown the door and executed in ten days, why can't Kashmiris get rid of India in a jiffy?" The execution of Checissco and his wife by the revolutionaries in Romania, led the Kashmiri extremists to believe that likewise they too could get freedom if they annihilated all those who were a stumbling block in their chosen path towards freedom. And these roadblocks were, in their view, the political leaders, business people, rich people, people with a modern or broad-minded outlook, and all those whom they perceived to be belonging to the upper crust of society.

But for the common man freedom had a different connotation, namely, two meals a day for everyone, full employment for all, end of all corruption, good education for the children and youth, including proper admissions to colleges, and prosperity for all. The people were told that all this could be achieved only if the government was based on Islamic principles. So much was the vehemence of this propaganda that innocent people genuinely believed that their woes were now shortlived, and the flowers of freedom would bloom soon.

Ghulam Qadir called at our house one day. He would often visit us and tell us about his work and about the goings on in the world around. But, today, his mood and tone were different. I wondered if he was the same person who was of good nature and full of humour and fun. Today, he was speaking the language of the extremists. He went on to say:

"We want freedom. We have tasted the fruits of association with India. We are getting poorer every day. They (the Indians) have only enabled their sycophants to amass wealth here." I was getting somewhat afraid while he talked. I did not reply to what he said. As he left my home, I became suspicious and looked around carefully to see if he had placed a bomb or any such device inside the house or outside.

Many homes were made targets in a series of bomb blasts that happened almost every day. Aisha Amin, who had severely criticized the kidnapping of Rubayya Sayeed was the butt of an attack. Her house was severely damaged by a bomb attack. Many beauty

parlours were bombed. A large number of schools were burnt to ashes. As of now, terrorism had taken a big leap forward. People did not know who were working from within in league with the new breed of revolutionaries.

On the 27th of December, P.N. Bhat, a well known advocate of Anantnag was riddled with bullets and killed on his way from the court to his home. This incident created tremendous fear and grave apprehensions in the minds of Kashmiri Hindus. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front which was the main front of the militants at that time issued press statements to the effect that they were eliminating only people who were either connected with some political parties or were "Mukhbirs" (informers of the government working against and spying on the militants). As far as the question of P.N. Bhat was concerned, it was quite well known that he was neither connected with any group nor was he an informer. He was an innocent man and everyone wondered why he should have been made a target of wanton killing. This was a million dollar question which every frightened Kashmiri Hindu was trying to find an answer to.

Looking through the pages of Kashmir's history, it is evident that peaceful times have been very few here. The valley of Kashmir has been subject to many invasions from outside, and has suffered intrigue and conspiracy from within. One party would arrive, loot and plunder, go back after loot and leave the people. This would be followed by another caravan of marauders who would frighten and subjugate the people for some time before they would be replaced by yet another gang. Under these circumstances the people of the valley developed a tentative kind of character without any fixed norms or values. They devised a way whereby they would manage to eke out their living somehow, being prepared to do anything to keep their superior, boss or ruler, pleased at all times. They devised a number of subtle weapons in the game such as, sycophancy, servility, backbiting and other traits of character which the tyranny of circumstances forced on them.

Cruelty and exploitation were common under various rulers who came invading the land one after another. The womenfolk

were maltreated and the populace subjected to a variety of abuses in order to use them for the entertainment of the rulers. There are many tales about the fantasies of the rulers and their adverse impact on the people, which are etched in the psyche of every Kashmiri child. Women and children were raped and abused and abducted to other lands.

Kashmiris are followers of Islam, Hindu and Sikh faiths. It is believed that the people are very intelligent and whatever task or trade they undertake, they very soon excel in its ways. Be it an ordinary activity or the complex art of politics, the Kashmiri shows his high calibre in both. And there are a number of Kashmiri names in the realm of arts, poetry, philosophy, medicine, sufi mysticism and the sciences which can be thought of in the present scenario who have made contributions of some value. This is also true of them in the realm of politics.

The relations between Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus have always been complex. It would not be wrong to say that these are based on a peculiar love-hate syndrome. The dress, language, living style, culture and genetic origin of both groups are identical. The family names are identical too, going back as they do to a common ancestor. Both groups love each other, depend on each other and have got used to living in close proximity with each other for centuries. They are used to sharing each other's woes and happiness, participating in marriages, deaths, and other social and religious occasions from time to time. One cannot distinguish easily who is a Muslim and who a Hindu. There are many places of worship where all Kashmiris worship and pay their obeisance without any distinction. The cultural heritage is common to all, giving rise to many common customs and rituals at the time of birth, marriage and death. Many Hindu children had Muslim foster-mothers and vice-versa. Quite often most munshis or teachers in the well-to-do Muslim household would be Kashmiri Hindus. And there are umpteen anecdotes, about sharing of love and mutual trust.

Inspite of this rich heritage there is a chasm somewhere which raises the question in every mind about the possible reasons for such a condition. And in the present context, innumerable prob-

lems are faced by the people which has given rise to tension amongst them. The most obvious reason for this tension is unemployment.

Both communities have been bereft of riches and capital for centuries, a few exceptions on either side notwithstanding. The Hindus have managed, however, to keep their traditional occupation with the written word alive, inspite of utmost difficulties faced by them in doing so. They maintained this wealth of learning within their fold at all costs. They learnt the language of the Pathans, of the Sikhs, and of the Dogras, and then the English, thereby managing to be of use to their rulers. For centuries they depended on petty service with the ruling classes in order to maintain themselves. Their Muslim brethren depended exclusively on agriculture, trade and the traditional arts for their sustenance. With the learning of English the Kashmiri Hindu became visible as a job seeking commodity in the government hierarchy.

The Muslim community was in the forefront as long as there was the sway of Persian and Arabic languages. With the advent of Urdu and English, particularly the latter, the Muslims came under the influence of the priests and maulvis. The priests sought to keep the masses away from the new education system on the plea that it was Christian education. At the same time, however, they did not deprive their own children from the benefits of the new education. Thereby, they were able to join the government services alongwith others. The mass of Muslim people were thereby not only deprived of the share of governance but also found it difficult to obtain schooling and education. The pressures of the caste system also played their traditional role inspite of the fact that the distinction of caste had apparently been wiped out by change of faith to Islam. As a consequence of these social, political, and religious factors, the Kashmiri Hindu became visible as a munshi, clerk, "patwari" or "girdawar" (petty revenue official) in the government hierarchy. His Muslim neighbour gradually became envious of his new power and a better living standard. When the autocratic rulers came out with a heavy hand on the poor masses on one pretext or the other, the Hindu Kashmiri

became the instrument of government and began to be hated and despised by the people (largely Muslims) as a factotum of the rulers.

Now times have changed. As time passed Kashmir has also gone through much change. A revolution took place in 1947, and the doors of freedom and democracy were opened wide. Lakhs of children got modern education and the number of engineers, doctors, graduates, and post-graduates could be counted in several thousands. The avenues for employment did not, however, keep pace with this increase, with the result that the number of educated unemployed youth also grew. Because of higher ambitions, there was growing resentment caused by lack of meaningful employment. The Kashmiri Hindu youth took advantage of the growing job opportunities in the whole country and abroad and jumped into the fray of competition, thereby carving a secure niche for themselves. Similarly, by and large, many Kashmiri Muslim youth found employment in the professions in West Asia, United Kingdom and U.S.A. But within the country, the Kashmiri Muslim youth preferred to confine their employment within the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This was primarily due to a sense of insecurity outside the home state. Such feelings were not uncommon amongst first generation educated youth in the other parts of the country. This attitude is echoed in the "sons-of-the-soil" attitude to government employment. The Muslim youth, therefore, very much resented the Kashmiri Hindu getting in banking and allied sectors, and began to harbour a grudge against the system. And it was obvious that there were many competitors for fewer positions in every field thus giving rise to rivalry, jealousy and ill-will. And in these situations, the exploitative politicians would rule the roost by inciting the emotions of the people rather than apply their minds to the solving of the basic problems. As a consequence, it would be observed that in any agitation there would be an element of estrangement against the Kashmiri Hindu, who happened to take the first brunt of the people's wrath in one form or the other, though not necessarily in a violent way.

There was another reason for the growing disaffection. The

gulf between the poor and the prosperous was visibly growing wide. A new class of wealthy people had grown rapidly. Their wealth was conspicuous, more so because their wealth was acquired in a short span of time. In these fast changing situations everyone felt the desire to get-rich-quick and become a wealthy prosperous Nawab or Sultan like the others had done. In this rat race many people did achieve results rather fast and they were not easily recognizable after the change. They were so engrossed with their new found wealth and status that they lost touch with their own reality. Consequently, their behaviour and attitudes towards their own poorer kith and kin became unsympathetic, even harsh.

As against this, those people who could not keep pace with this competition and revolutionary transformation became envious and developed hatred born out of low self-esteem. The youth in this group of population became the new revolutionaries and took the lead in the extremists postures and agitation. To gain their objective these youth took support of religion and unfurled the flag of extremism in the valley. To garner the support of the disgruntled, it was necessary that the first brunt of the new revolution had to be taken by the Kashmiri Hindu, as well as the wealthy Kashmiri Muslims. Both were sought to be depicted as agents of India and eliminating them became their immediate creed. Pakistan found the sociological conditions ripe for its propaganda war and it backed the extremists to the hilt with arms and ammunition. Thereby began the extremist turmoil in the valley.

In the month of December many police personnel were gunned down by the militants. Mustafa Qadri, Assistant Sub-Inspector, O.N.Wattal, Deputy Superintendent of Police, and Ali Mohd. Moghlu were shot by them. There were bomb explosions in many banks as well as at the satellite station at Hari Parbat. Krishan Gopal and Hamidullah Bhat of the police department also lost their lives along with others. They were not only killed but their cruelly mutilated bodies were hung from trees on the main roadways. It was publicly announced by the militants that those who would not obey their orders would meet the same fate as these

hanged victims have had earlier. Naturally, fear and terror were spread throughout the valley. The story did not end here. Government employees began to receive severe threats for not toeing the militants' line and the officers of radio and television were the first victims of these executed threats.

A minister in the Farooq Cabinet, Ali Mohd. Sagar made a public statement to the effect that the status of Jammu and Kashmir within the Union of India should be reverted to that of the year 1953. This caused a flutter in the political circles at the Centre, but it did not have any effect on either local politics or the posture of the militants. It was later revealed, however, that Ali Mohd. Sagar had made the statement in order to save his skin from the wrath of the militants.

All the video parlours and cinema houses were ordered to be shut down by the militants. Beauty parlours had been already shut down after many faced bomb blasts. By now every child was caught up in this severe cyclonic storm. The dream of "freedom" was now alluring everyone, children, youth, men and women, were all caught up by a vision of the wonderful bird "freedom". The word "freedom" echoed in every home and became part of the environment itself. Wherever one would look, in the lanes, on the roads, in the shops, in hospitals, in bazars, or within offices or outside thousand of flags were hoisted everywhere with the sign of the JKLF printed thereon. The walls and open spaces were also painted with the words JKLF all over the valley. Like magic these things happened almost overnight and the city appeared to be engulfed by this new flood. All the offices were closed, and the extremists had spread their control over government organizations. The administration of the state had virtually collapsed. The youth went about in the various segments of the town with truck-loads of rice and vegetables which they sold. They also distributed cash doles amongst the needy people. Rations of rice and flour picked up from the godowns of the government distribution system were distributed amongst them. No distinction was made at this time between Hindus and Muslims.

In the month of January, there were buses and trucks moving around in the heart of the town and attracting people to take a ride

to "Islamabad-Rawalpindi! Islamabad-Rawalpindi" as they shouted these words from the buses. "Come one, come all. Take a free ride to Islamabad-Rawalpindi. Earn merit and join the jehad."

Many young men were lured to go in this spate. Many parents even did not know till the children had gone or been whisked away. They had said a final good-bye to their homes. The youth would get into these vehicles and feel exhilarated as if they were going to join a "barat" (marriage procession) with themselves as bridegrooms.

They were happy, enthusiastic, and full of pride about their activities and it showed on their faces. There was a strange desire evident in their eyes, a desire to own the sun and the moon, a wish to realize a long lost dream, the Utopia that had eluded them for long. They were, however, not quite sure about their destination, nor did they know if at all their dreams would ever come true. All the same, they were attracted towards an elusive goal, the way a moth is drawn by the consuming flame.

They were convinced that their chosen path led only to the golden future of their imagination, and very soon they would be filled with joy and prosperity. The parents, whose children were going with their consent, were celebrating the occasion with their neighbours over cups of "Kahwa" (black Kashmiri tea with sugar and saffron) and tea cakes. There was a sudden, rather God ordained, burst of energy seen amongst many people. Discrimination seemed to have been given a go-by and the Frankenstein of "Freedom" had gripped their minds. One of my helpers went to buy fruit in the market one day. This is what transpired between him and the shopkeeper.

"How much of grapes shall I weigh for you?", asked the shopkeeper.

"Half a kilogram, please. Are the grapes sweet?"

"Come on man! Don't worry. After a few days only, I will get you Kabuli grapes. Then you won't have any complaint."

There were a few other customers at the shop. They joined words with him and added:

"Insha Allah ! Insha Allah ! yes, of course."

Such was the intensity of propaganda that the common man

had been led up the garden path, to believe that Utopia was round the corner. Come "freedom" of their description and poverty will vanish in a jiffy. Every desire would be fulfilled, whether it was for a house, land, higher post, a job, or admission to a professional training. "Freedom" would get everyone what they wanted, thus were they lured into the battle for freedom.

I cannot help narrating the following incident which occurred in those heady days. Ghulam Mohd. is a very skilled gardener and he was known to us for a long time. One day he dropped in to see us as usual, and showed me a slip of paper which he took out from his pocket. Something in Urdu was written on the slip. Before I read it, I asked:

"Have you come to collect some donation? What is this?", I pointed towards the slip of paper.

"Donations? No. Is that what is written on it?", he asked me showing lot of curiosity.

"I did not open and read it," I said but I was scared because I wasn't sure if this was some kind of a notice or warrant by the militants.

"Please peruse it carefully," he said quietly, unruffled.

"It's something about admission", I hadn't finished the sentence when he added:

"Soon after "freedom" my brother will get a seat for the medical college. This is what is promised in this paper." He said with joy shining in his eyes.

Hearing him, I carefully examined the slip again and found a faint and smeared seal of JKLF at the bottom.

"Who gave you this paper?", I asked.

"One Mujahid (the participant in a holy war or "jihad") gave it to me. He's a top leader. His word cannot be false."

"Many others must have received similar slips?" I don't know why I asked him this question.

"Yes, they've got them. But only poor people. These 'mujahids' are the friends of the down-trodden and poor people. God had sent them as our saviours." He said all this with total belief.

"Will this paper be sufficient to secure admission for Bilal?"

I was feeling sorry for this innocent and honest man for being lost in this manner chasing a mirage. Ghulam Mohd. would often talk about the examination result of his brother. And, I knew that Bilal had twice failed in his matriculation examination.

"This is what I'm telling you. They have taken pity over my plight. And they will achieve what they have promised. That's their way." There was total faith evident in his words, and I did not stretch the conversation any further.

The ranks of the militants began to grow rapidly and with that there was a rise in the number of militant organisations as well. Firstly, there was one, then there were ten, rapidly growing into twenty, forty and even eighty groups. The local press gave names of umpteen organisations with different names. Often a few youth would get together and create a new outfit. Of course, the JKLF was the major group which had caught the imagination of the people. Alongside, other groups were also growing rather imperceptibly. These included Hizb-ul-Islam, Hazabullah, Allah Tigers, Zarbe-i-Momen, JKLSF, Janbaz Force, Balakote, Dukhtar-an-i-Millat and many others which kept on growing and spreading their tentacles amongst the people.

By now Pakistan was openly supporting these militant youth by providing money, arms, morale boosting speeches by eminent Pakistani leaders. Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, made very rhetorical outbursts on Pakistan T.V. which were openly meant to incite the Kashmiri youth in the name of Islam and against the Union of India.

On the other hand, hordes of Kashmiri youth were crossing the line of actual control in the Kashmir valley and going over to Pakistan for arms training in camps located in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) or in Punjab, Pakistan. Many youths were also returning and crossing back into the valley duly trained in the use of arms and carrying all kinds of ammunition for their militant activity. It appears that there was some problem of slackness by the Border Security Force (BSF) at this juncture.

Training camps were created by Pakistan in POK, Rawalpindi and some other places, where the youths were trained for a week or ten days or a few months and sent back. At the same time these

young men were given new names. A few youth would together be constituted into a new group, and they would be kept totally ignorant about the work of the other groups. These groups created their own new dynamics and the problems of terrorism became ever more complicated.

If JKLF wanted and vouchsafed "freedom", the Hizbe-i-Islami wanted the state to secede from India and join Pakistan. If one group would call for a day's "bandh" there would be another which asked shopkeepers to remain off for three days. If one group claimed to have killed a government employee or a political worker, the other groups would kill many innocent people in order not to be left behind in the race for number of killings undertaken by them.

If the JKLF would proclaim the creed of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh unity, the other fundamentalist groups would put to death Hindus. With all these apparent contradictions in approach, however, one thing was achieved by all. With the use of arms the threats of force, and actual cruel killing of many people, the militants had succeeded in sealing the mouths of the silent majority of sensible and discriminating citizens of the valley. The voices of reason had been silenced. Thereby, it was a victory for the militants in all walks of civic life, and the people would be made to dance like puppets which gave immense gratification to the misguided youth. At the same time, the youth were exhilarated over the discovery of new power that came out of the barrel of a gun.

All those groups who were returning from Pakistan after receiving training in use of arms, raised more groups of youth within the valley and the numbers were growing rapidly. At the same time lot of arms and ammunition were being sent in across the border. A sea of humanity ready for insurgency was becoming apparent. Those boys who had returned from Pakistan were called "authentic" mujahids. And groups of local origin were called "spurious" mujahids viz. "Asli" and "Naqli" and "Naqli" mujahids became so large that the people began to perceive the problems that this new phenomenon created. Who are the "Asli" and who are the "Naqli"? This was a serious and profound problem. For collecting donations, these people started going from

house to house, and it was really extremely difficult for the people to distinguish in these matters. Any wrong move on their part could be very risky. One could lose one's life if the group was annoyed.

To begin with if the militants killed a government employee or a political worker, the people would casually say, "He had to die because he was an 'informer'." In that fashion many innocent citizens faced death because they were labelled "informers". A Hindu, whether he was a government employee, a trader, or whether he was connected or not connected with any political outfit, would be viewed with suspicion anytime. If he was killed, then whatever the reason, the label of "informer" would be stuck to him. The man in the street whether Hindu or Muslim was truly in a stupor. They went on thinking and foolishly believing: "I'm saved. How am I bothered about the others."

The terrorists eliminated the "informers". Then it was the turn of the "kafir" who was a roadblock, closely followed by people belonging to political parties who were chosen for killing. The rich people became the next target, some being killed because they were corrupt or did not cough up enough money for the cause. There were others who were labelled "sarmayadar" (capitalist) and therefore eliminated. In this manner the number of people falling victim to extremist frenzy and violence became larger and affected every section of society. At the same time mutual rivalries amongst the militant groups also surfaced adding to people's confusion and escalated wanton killings.

Chapter 26

Paradise Destroyed

ON the 19th January 1990, Jagmohan was appointed Governor of Jammu and Kashmir for the second time in a few years. Dr. Farooq resigned his office of Chief Minister in protest against this decision. Dr. Farooq had lost his grip over the administration, the law and order in the state was shattered, and therefore, he was in dire need of a convenient excuse to extricate himself from the mess he had created. And the Governor's appointment provided him just that on a platter.

Hardly anyone in Kashmir slept on the night of 21st January. The sound of commotion and hysterical screaming spewed out of hundreds of mosques. Anti-India slogans rent the air coupled with "Allah-o-Akbar" and "Nizam-e-Mustafa". The noise hammered incessantly on the ear drums. People from all corners of the city poured out on the streets, milling around agitatedly in spontaneous processions. Whoever dared to stay indoors was threatened with dire consequences. People owing allegiance to secular political parties were terrified to see the massive spectacle and were afraid that they might be the first victims of the onslaught of people in anger. It looked as if everybody was hell bent on killing those who swore by Indian secularism, who trembled at the prospect of being victimized in this spate of terrible anger. They knew that by the time the government machinery woke up, the streets would be streaming with innocent blood. Government officers, who may have controlled the situation, were scared to their bones. What else could they do in such a situation? When a tiny stream suddenly erupts forth with the flooding fury of an ocean, who saves whom? People surged forward blindly trudging along unknown paths, dragging their feet towards unknown destination—pulled forward like helpless pawns in the hands of destiny.

For the youth of Kashmir, it was like a dream come true—riding across the night sky on a beautiful chariot drawn by healthy stallions full of energy. But alas! the charioteer was far away beyond the mountains, in Pakistan. Reins firmly in his hand, he watched the wild careering of the chariot as it sped on at a furious pace. He would pull up the reins sometimes, loosen them at other times as the chariot plunged forward violently crushing everything in its path. The chariot waywardly sped on goalless towards an unknown destination. People were apprehensive and feared that this chariot would one day hurtle over a cliff carrying its dreamy passengers along with it to catastrophe, into an abyss, to an end which would be hard to undo.

It is hard to say how much blood has flown down the Jhelum,—the Vitasta or Weth of yore—, since this book was begun. How many innocent people have died? How many have seen their homes burnt to ashes? Who can say how many have lost their homes? How many women have lost their husbands, their sons, their honour? Who kept a track of how many innocent children became orphans or how many people were rendered destitute?

How many schools—which saw the smiles of blossoming children—today stand in ruins? Public property worth crores was blown up or shattered by bombs or arson. How many vehicles were destroyed?

How many dear ones lie buried in silent graves? Lakhs of people have run away in fear, leaving home and hearth. Who knows how many have fallen to the dust—victims of the blazing sun, scorpions and snakes? How many have locked their homes and shops and wandered aimless in the streets? How many thousands of shops are open but without any work? How many thousands of artisans are dying of starvation or helplessly, hopefully waiting for the day of redemption. Who knows how many thousands of Kashmiris are roaming around the streets of the country in search of some means of sustenance while their beautiful homeland continues to burn?

I want to ask, whose homes have been destroyed? Who have been ruined? Whose blood flowed? Who were killed? Whose children died? Whose flourishing and beautiful garden was

uprooted?

It was Kashmir that was destroyed, Kashmiri blood which flowed.
It were Kashmiris who died in thousands.

Why did all this happen? To what end? Who is responsible for
this gruesome tragedy? Who is responsible? Who?

Chapter 27

Epilogue

Events in Kashmir have raced fast over the last two years. I have already described the essential outlines of these tragic developments which continue unabated even while I am writing these lines. The patterns of militant activity are now familiar. The government's response to these is stereotyped. It seems that the see-saw battle doesn't have an end in sight. Deep down in every heart, however, there is still hope that peace and harmony will return to our beautiful land.

Sometimes, however, our illusions are rudely shattered by gruesome events that are beyond our control. In human affairs, the role played by the unseen hand of Almighty God often tends to be forgotten by people who are full of their own egos, and perceive larger roles for themselves than Nature would ever permit them. I was perhaps destined to receive such a violent jolt myself, and this book would not be complete without a brief mention of that traumatic and profound experience. I thank God for having kept us alive to be able to share these moments with others.

Fortyfive Days with the Militants

After I had handed the manuscript of this book to my publisher in mid-August 1991, I devoted my complete attention to personal affairs. Accompanied by my husband, Dr. O.N. Wakhlu, I stayed with my brother Dr. S.N. Dhar and my bhabi Dr. Mrs. Vimla Dhar at their residence in Srinagar. This enabled us to look after my mother, who is aged and ailing, besides attending to other personal matters. After a while, my mother became slightly better and came out of danger. Then my sister-in-law was taken ill with viral fever. Therefore, we stayed on in their house and only

towards the end of August, when she recovered, did we move to live in our own house at Buchwara, situated at the foot of Shankaracharya Hill and facing the famous Dal lake.

The house was provided with police protection. A small contingent of the Jammu and Kashmir Armed Police was assigned by the State for guard duty of the premises. The atmosphere in Srinagar was, as usual, saturated with rumour, suspicion, fear and apprehension. We did not move around freely or unnecessarily. Most of the time we remained inside our house. Friends and well wishers kept dropping in. Life was going on at a slow pace to which we were used by now. The weather was fine, the best that one could hope for in the first week of September. Bright sunshine was coming from a spotless blue sky, and flowers were in their best bloom all over. Only people were sad, unhappy, worried, even sick—physically as well as mentally. The birds seemed happy too if one were to go by their chirpings. I am not sure about the animals though. Our dog "Delphi" was not in her brightest mood at all. I could see her whining, at times, like a human child. It was amazing to see such total sadness on Delphi's face. It would not be far-fetched to say that all the animals, in the valley suffered the same fate as humans did. We are so much inter-dependent after all.

On September 4, 1991, a friend's son dropped in to see us. He warned us to take care and not to move out of home. We agreed and promised not to venture out. Later, in the afternoon another friend called on us and reinforced the same fears. We requested him not to be apprehensive. "Trust Dastagir Sahib. Don't worry unnecessarily. Allah protects us all," my husband told his friend as he saw him off at the gate.

Dusk was now approaching. My husband and I went inside picking up books and papers from where we were sitting in the garden. I went straight to the bathroom for a wash. My husband was in the living room. Suddenly he was startled by some noise at the gate. He apprehended some mischief and quickly bolted the door behind him. Thus we had locked ourselves in the bathroom, in fear and in stupor. After ransacking the premises the armed militants were finally pounding at the bathroom door. They broke

a huge hole in it while they also threatened to blow us up with a grenade. In that utter confusion we could only hear the shrill barks and shrieks of our dog. The noise outside was deafening. We could hear the loud thuds as our belongings were bashed into smithereens by the militants. At that point we mechanically opened the bathroom door and they ordered us to raise up our hands!

We were driven away by the militants in a three wheeler parked outside the house, and later carried to the heart of Srinagar in a hospital ambulance. From now on, we were hostages of the Hizbullah militants and in for a long and unknown tough time.

Our long saga of fortyfive days with the militants came to an end on the morning of October 18, 1991. A contingent of the army had completely surrounded the village where we were kept captive for a couple of days. We and our captors were in deep slumber when a frightened neighbour warned us about the crack-down early in the morning after she had seen the cordon of the soldiers. We were desperately moved around by our captors in their bid to escape from the clutches of the army. We spent a few desperate hours of the morning in dreadful fear fully reconciled to the prospect of certain death in the ensuing encounter between the army and the militants.

We prayed and held together firmly. The militants wanted to separate us and gain some tactical advantage. We refused to oblige them, offering our bodies instead, to be riddled with bullets before we are separated. We clung on together. In the ensuing human drama which lasted a couple of hours we saw death hanging over our heads very closely. The army commandoes were zeroing in fast while our captors were desperately trying to begin action from behind a makeshift bunker. They had machine guns, Klashnikovs and lot of ammunition with them. Above all, they were imbued with a great desire to become martyrs in the name of "Jehad". We prayed and argued with them. In those frightful moments, these were the only weapons we had with us.

The army loudspeakers were meanwhile blaring out orders for people to come out of their homes. We were in a fix. It is a long story how and when we finally came out to be picked up by the

soldiers. We were finally in the army camp and were flown back to Srinagar, a couple of hours later in a helicopter. We thanked God Almighty for His intervention in rescuing us. We had a rebirth!

We are deeply grateful to all those people who gave us their love in abundance; who prayed and worked assiduously for our safe release, those who gave our children tremendous support and encouragement; and those officers and men of the army and the government who carried out the rescue mission. During the course of our captivity we lived for varying periods of time in about 57 homes. All those people showered love and hospitality on us in good measure. We owe all of them a debt of gratitude. With their sympathy and love which they expressed in many different ways, we were better able to cope with the agonizing moments throughout this period.

We met a cross-section of people in the villages and a sizeable number of youth belonging to manifold militant organisations. We talked to all of them about education, religion, social life, political situation, Kashmiriyat, human emotions, and above all, on ways and means for building bridges and winning human hearts. These interactions have reinforced our faith in the values of love and goodness which are still very deeply ingrained in the Kashmiri ethos.

Our experience was traumatic and unique. We propose to share them with others in our forthcoming book on the subject.

Index

- Abdullah, Begum, 35, 37-39, 43-47,
61, 64, 66, 74, 77, 86, 91-92, 98,
128, 138-40, 162, 165, 172-73,
179, 182-83, 195-97, 202, 218-19,
226, 243, 251, 254, 259-60, 271,
273, 276, 311, 327
- Abdullah, Farooq, 4, 64, 67-68, 74,
99, 108, 110, 112, 118-19, 128,
130, 134, 232, 234-35, 238-42,
244-48, 250-59, 263-64, 266-68,
280, 289-90, 297, 311-14, 316,
322-25, 329-30, 333-34, 336, 338,
343-45, 347-48, 350, 355-56, 358-
61, 363, 367, 374-75, 384, 390
accord with Maulvi Farooq, 191-
201
and death of Sheikh Abdullah,
165-76
as Chief Minister of Jammu and
Kashmir, 177-90
as President of National Confer-
ence, 138-64
assemble elections of 1983, 202-
14
Rajiv accord, 318-19, 329
- Abdullah, Molly, 64, 254
- Abdullah, Sheikh Mohammed, 4, 6,
9-10, 16-17, 30-54, 105, 138-43,
145, 147, 150-51, 154-58, 160-64,
177-85, 188-89, 191-93, 198, 202,
206, 211-14, 225, 231-32, 242-43,
249, 254, 260, 264-65, 269-71,
287, 292-93, 301, 322, 324, 329,
331, 349, 359
death of, 165-76
elections of 1977 and, 55-62
Indira accord, 18-28
mid-term poll of 1980, 108-15
political situation in Kashmir, 41-
44, 116-38
prosperity in Kashmir, 63-101
- Abdullah, Tariq, 111, 263-64, 268,
283
- Advani, L. K., 366
- Afzal, Qazi, 346-47
- Ahmad, Muzaffar, 242
- Ahmad, Nissar, 346
- Ahmed, Iqbal, 261, 356
- Ahmed, Mian Basir, 69
- Ahmed, Nazir, 308
- Akbar, Sofi Mohd., 63, 331
- Alexander, P.C., 228
- Ali, Begum Zafar, 64, 87, 129, 141
- Ali, Sadiq, 218-19
- Ali, Surraya, 162, 167, 172
- Alshahni, Noorie Faizal, 136
- Alvi, 327
- Amer, 129
- Amin, Aisha, 196, 327, 378
- Amla, Tirath Ram, 262, 299
- Anantnag events in, 131-34
- Ansari, Maulvi Iftikar Hussain, 355
- Ansar-ul-Islam, 351
- Arsani, Iftikar, 314
- Azad, Ghulam Nabi, 294, 319
- Azad, Maulana, 56
- Badarwahi, G.M., 122-25, 162, 268,
287
- Badhana, 267
- Bahuguna, H. N., 138, 236-37
- Bakshi, 7
- Bakula, Kushak, 270
- Bamzai, P.N.K., 148-49
- Banarjee, Sushital, 33
- Bandey, Hissam-ud-din, 25, 35, 71,
79, 126-27, 143, 162, 168, 208,
263, 313

- Bargotra, Dhan Raj, 345
 Basu, Jyoti, 236, 272
 Bawan, G.M., 213-14
 Baxi, Janki Nath, 154
 Beg, Begum Afzal, 161
 Beg, Mehboob, 260-62, 264, 271, 274, 293, 304, 312, 323, 328
 Beg, Mirza Mohd. Afzal, 19, 22-25, 28, 34-35, 37, 44, 47-49, 59, 77, 90, 115, 122-24, 137, 140-41, 146, 161, 175, 260, 274
 Bhadarwahi, G.M., 35, 306
 Bhagat, H.K.L., 294, 297
 Bhasin, Ved, 302, 373
 Bhasin, Yash, 302-03
 Bhat, Ghulam Nabi, 35, 120-21, 175, 204, 208
 Bhat, Hamidullah, 383
 Bhat, Lassa, 356
 Bhat, M.L., 375
 Bhat, Mohd. Shafi, 371
 Bhat, P.N., 379
 Bhawan, G.M., 331, 369-70, 375
 Bhindranwale, 248
 Bhutto, Benazir, 59-60, 349, 361, 387
 Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali, 59, 93-96, 98-99, 121, 308, 338
 Bukhari, Sayyad Abdullah, 337, 374
 Butt, Ghulam Mohd., 192
 Butt, Maqbool, 349, 369

 Chand, Nek, 285
 Chandrasekhar, 237
 Chavan, S.B., 361
 Checissco, 378
 Chintsaz, G.M., 120
 Chopra, Om, 345
 Chopra, Pran, 363

 Dar, Mohammad Maqbool, 270
 Dar, Sona-ullah, 69, 261, 264, 271, 293
 Dar, Ganesh, 356
 Ded, Lala, 167

 Desai, Morarji, 56-68
 Dev, Kapil Mohan, 316
 Deva, Abdul Salam, 25, 34-35, 40, 242-43
 Dhar, D.P., 29, 309
 Dhar, S.N., 234-35, 245, 393
 Dhar, Vijay, 309
 Dhar, Vimla, 234, 393
 Dhawan, R.K., 229
 Dogra, G.L., 328-29, 331
 Dogra, Neera, 176
 Dogra, R.N., 175

 Farooq, Maulana Mohammad, 4, 23, 31, 50, 56-58, 99, 191-94, 274, 279, 289-90, 318, 333-34, 363
 Farooq, Maulvi Mohammad, 136, 204, 215, 222, 247, 252, 258
 Farooq, Mir Waiz Maulana, 358
 Fayaz-ud-din, 53
 Fotedar, M.L., 281

 Gandhi, Indira, 18-28, 41-42, 47, 71-73, 114, 173-74, 178, 180, 199, 211-12, 215, 219, 221-22, 224-25, 228, 230, 232-34, 237-38, 244-45, 247, 255-57, 266, 272-73, 276, 298
 accord with Sheikh Abdullah, 18-28
 Gandhi, M.K., 18, 56, 101, 178
 Gandhi, Rajiv, 174, 273, 276, 281, 286, 298, 303, 314-16, 318-19, 323-25, 329, 336, 342, 345, 358, 366
 Ganjoo, Nil Kanth, 369
 Ganjoo, P.N., 272
 Geelani, Syeed Ali Shah, 277-78, 340
 Gehlot, Ashok, 293
 Ghani, Abdul, 356
 Gopal, Krishan, 383
 Gujral, I.K., 162-63, 363, 375
 Gul, Mubarak, 208-09
 Gupta, Janak Raj, 256, 260-63, 277,

- 302, 314
 Guru, Abdul Ahad, 375
- Habib-ul-Rahman, 53
 Hakhoo, Nil Kanth, 54
 Halwai, Mohd. Youssuf, 250, 362-63
 Handoo, P.L., 216, 250, 266, 312, 336, 356, 371
 Hayal, 129
 Hegde, R.K., 245-46, 286, 332
 Heptullah, Najma, 316
 Hidayatullah, M., 235
 Hidayatullah, Pushpa, 235
History of Kashmir, 148
 Hussain, Saddam, 136
 Hussain, Talib, 242, 246, 263, 283, 306, 312, 315, 326, 345
- Iqbal, Allama Mohammad, 205
 Iqbal, Mohammad, 101, 166
Islamic Civilization, 206
- Jabbar, Sheikh Abdul, 264, 281, 312
 Jagmohan, 246, 262, 278, 287, 314, 316, 327, 348, 358
 Jalali, P.N., 234
 Jammu and Kashmir,
 corruption in government in, 13-16
 culture, 11, 155-57
 educational facilities, 15
 elections, 6-17, 55-62, 202-14
 Farooq Abdullah as Chief Minister, 177-90
 G.M. Shah as Chief Minister, 260-310
 Governor's rule in, 311-18
 living conditions in, 7-9, 15, 63-101
 MUF wave in, 320-32, 340-41
 mid-term poll, 108-15
 militancy in, 333-39, 387
 political situation, 41-44, 116-38, 340-89
 shrines in, 11-13
- Jan, Ali Mohd., 61
 Jan, Mohd. Yussuf, 310
 Jha, L.K., 47, 102, 128, 144-46, 231, 294, 324, 331
 Jha, Mekhla, 102-03, 105, 107, 117, 231, 294, 324
 Jowher, Mohd. Khalil, 264
 Jung, Ali Yavar, 127
- Kabuli, Abdul Rashid, 204, 209-10, 358
 Kachroo, K.N., 81
 Kak, R.K., 36, 38
 Kamal, Mustafa, 358
 Kar, Ghulam Rasool, 337, 342-43, 355, 358
 Karra, Mohi-ud-din, 35
 Kashmir Times, 288, 302, 373
 Kaul, D.N., 75
 Kaul, Gwash Lal, 261
 Kaul, K.N., 230-31
 Kaul, Lassa, 356
 Kaul, R.N., 301
 Kaul, S.K., 196, 244-45, 310
 Kaul, Sheila, 230-31
 Kaul, T.N., 223
 Khajuria, 288, 307
 Khan, Abdul Majid, 341
 Khan, Arif Mohammad, 326, 332, 375
 Khan, Buland, 242
 Khan, Ghulam Ishaq, 59-60
 Khan, Khurshid Alam, 149-50, 266
 Khan, Masood, 205
 Khan, Mohammad Ashraf, 69, 71
 Khan, Rafiq Hussain, 254, 268, 271, 283, 295, 318
 Khoemeni, Ayatullah, 113, 119, 156, 349, 360
 Kochak, G.N., 25, 33, 35, 39, 41, 81, 143, 180, 262-63, 271, 273-74, 311, 313, 319
 Kochak, Ghulam Rasool, 109

- Krishnamurthy, Yamini, 233, 367
- Ladakh, culture of, 102-07
- Lal, Jagjivan, 268, 271, 318
- Lone, Abdul Ghani, 50, 69-70, 246, 295, 304, 320, 340, 346, 359
- Madan, T.N., 79
- Malik, Ghulam-ud-din, 246
- Malik, Mohi-ud-din, 69, 109-10, 356
- Malik, Ruqayya, 373, 376
- Malik, Satpal, 332
- Malik, Sayeed, 372-74
- Maqbool, Sheikh, 336
- Masoodi, Maulana, 35, 50
- Mattoo, Surraya, 98, 297
- Meraj, Zafar, 373-74, 376
- Mir, Dilawar, 254-56, 262-64, 274, 278-79, 281, 288, 291, 293, 303, 315
- Mir, Ghulam Hassan, 246, 262-64, 271, 301
- Moghlu, Ali Mohd., 383
- Mohammed, Bakshi Ghulam, 24, 29, 35, 85, 226, 249, 292, 329, 386-87
- Mohini, Jagat, 310
- Mujahid, Saddar-ud-din, 188-89
- Murti, Maria, 296
- Murti, Ram, 296
- Mustafa, Mir, 364, 375
- Naik, Ali Mohd., 264, 271, 279, 303-04, 306, 312-13, 315
- Nangyal, 269,
- Namtahali, G.N., 346
- Naqshabandi, Mubarak Shah, 35-37
- Narayan, M.K., 350
- Narboo, Pinto, 270
- Narboo, Sonam, 23, 25, 28, 270
- Nasarullah, Mir, 263
- Nath, Dina, 356
- Nath, Iqbal, 356
- Nath, Maheshwar, 356
- Nayyar, Kuldip, 363
- Nazir, Sheikh, 25, 57, 61, 143-44, 147-48, 160, 167, 173, 182, 198, 202, 243, 258
- Nazki, Farooq, 322-23
- Neelora, 242
- Nengroo, 113
- Nehru, Arun, 281, 305, 315, 326, 332, 375
- Nehru, B.K., 163, 175, 196-97, 208, 217, 222, 224, 233, 235, 240-41, 244-47
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, 18, 26, 56
- Nehru, Shobha, 144-45, 148-49, 171, 182, 233, 235-36, 244, 247
- Nissar, Qazi, 315, 320, 340
- Noorani, Noor-ud-din, 167
- Oberoi, Dharmvir Singh, 74-75, 78, 142-43, 150-51, 160, 168, 185-86, 189, 198, 217-18, 241, 267
- Panorama*, 302
- Pant, K.C., 208, 355
- Para, Noor Mohd., 175
- Parmanand, 35
- Parthasarthy, G., 19, 24
- Peshin, S.N., 166
- Pilot, Rajesh, 316
- Piplani, 103, 106, 149
- Plebiscite Front, desolution of, 29-39
- Pratibha, 72
- Probe*, 198
- Qadir, Ghulam, 378
- Qadri, Mustafa, 383
- Qasim, Sayyed Mir, 20, 29, 31, 258, 329
- Qayyum, Abdul, 332, 375
- Qureshi, Mohd. Safi, 362
- Rahman, Sheikh Abdul, 322, 345
- Ram, Jagjivan, 42, 55-56
- Ram, Mula, 336

- Ramani, Ali Raza, 136
 Rana, Gurbachan Kumari, 217, 262-64, 281
 Rao, N.T. Rama, 236-37, 371
 Rashid, Sheikh, 25, 89, 109, 114-21, 143, 160, 162, 208, 221-22, 224-27, 319, 335
 Rasool, Mir Gulshan, 53-54
 Rather, 253-54, 257
 Razdan, D.K., 123
 Rishi, 168, 173, 175
 Rushdie Salman, 349
- Sachchar, Rajender, 363
 Sadiq, G.M., 7, 23, 29, 69, 249, 329
 Sagar, Ali Mohd., 88-89, 208, 350, 384
 Salati, Mohiuddin, 310
 Samad, Abdul, 175, 362
 Sangeen, 196
 Sarabhai, Mridula, 19, 32
Satanic Verses, 349
 Sathe, Vasant, 135
 Sawhney, Kunti, 327
 Sayeed, Mufti Mohd., 295, 314-16, 325-26, 328, 332, 336, 344-45, 358, 372-74, 376
 Sayeed, Rubayya, 372-78
 Shafi, Mohd., 71
 Shah, Ali, 32
 Shah, Begum Khalida, 61, 63, 86-87, 127, 162, 249, 251, 257, 262, 271-72, 276-77, 284-85, 291, 293, 303, 311, 313, 319
 Shah, G.M., 25, 33, 35, 37, 39-40, 43-44, 47-48, 57, 61, 63, 70, 80, 85, 91, 114-15, 126, 142-43, 145-46, 151, 159, 162, 167-73, 175, 179, 184, 202, 242, 244, 246, 248-49, 251, 255-58, 311-13, 318-19, 358
 as Chief Minister, 260-310
 Shah, Ghulam Din, 262-63
 Shah, Maulvi Yussuf, 191
- Shah, Mohi-ud-din, 25, 143-44, 160, 168-70, 177, 208, 237, 266
 Shah, Mubarak, 149-50
 Shah, Muzaffar, 273, 275-77
 Shah, Peer Ghulam Hassan, 263
 Shah, Rashid, 310
 Shah, Shabir, 367-68
 Shahani, 65-66
 Shahbuddin, 205
 Shaheen, Abdul Rashid, 118, 242
 Shahmiri, Tahira, 87
 Shahnaz, 129
 Shaida, Shafi, 211
 Shamim, Shamim Ahmed, 373-74
 Sharif-ud-din, 185-86, 189, 217-18
 Sharma, Anand, 295-96
 Sharma, Mangat Ram, 255-57, 262, 267-68, 314, 355
 Shaw, Mahmooda Ali, 71-72
 Shawl, Mohi-ud-din, 35, 43, 78, 121
 Sheikh, N.C., 57
 Shonthoo, G.M., 35
 Singh, Bhim, 246, 359
 Singh, Balwan, 345
 Singh, Buta, 330, 355, 361
 Singh, Charan, 55-56
 Singh, Dalbir, 316
 Singh, Hari, 191
 Singh, Jaswant, 309
 Singh, V.P., 325-26, 328, 332, 337-38, 344-45, 362-63, 371-71
 Singh, Zail, 213, 231
 Sinha, Tarkeshwari, 236-37
 Sogami, G.N., 69
 Sonaullah, 71
 Sopori, Bhajan, 223
 Soz, Saif-ud-din, 109, 371
- Taploo, Tikka Lal, 309, 365-66
 Teli, Abdul Samad, 35, 48-49, 58, 114, 132-35, 162, 174-75, 208, 212, 240, 284
 Thakur, Devi Dass, 23, 25, 28, 65, 75, 122-23, 140-41, 143, 160, 162,

- 170, 174, 184, 228-29, 262-63, 273, 281, 285, 287-89, 291, 293, 300, 304, 375
 Thussu, Prem Nath, 73
 Tikku, Mohan Kishen, 23, 25, 35, 66-67, 121, 163, 249-50
Times of India, 255, 367
 Ullah, Hakim Habib, 25, 66, 128-29, 143, 177
 Ullah, Munshi Habib, 105, 242, 263-64, 302, 318
 Uri, Mohd. Shafi, 69
 Vaidya, 284-85, 315
 Vaishnavi, Samsar Chand, 154
 Vakil, Abdul Ahad, 25, 43, 45, 121, 126, 143, 168
 Venkataraman, R., 286
 Wakhlu, Khemlata, 32, 37, 107, 152, 175, 219, 221, 223, 234, 264, 323
 Wakhlu, O.N., 66, 107, 393
 Wakhlu, Libee, 138, 140
 Wangnool, Ghulam Mohd., 174-75, 240
 Wani, A.R., 237, 319
 Wattal, O.N., 383
 Yasin, Hakim Mohd., 246, 261-64, 271, 301
 Yatoo, Ali Mohd., 216, 267-68
 Zardari Asif Ali, 60
 Zia-ul-Haq, 59, 93-95, 98, 121, 338-39